

Screen



Film histories/histories in film:

Sierck/Sirk

Traffic in Souls

Orlando

Questions of method

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'Avenging women in Indian cinema'
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Film history\terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies

BARBARA KLINGER

In the early 1980s, Tony Bennett called for a revolution in literary study, in which one would no longer just study the text, but ‘everything which has been written *about* it, everything which has been collected on it, becomes attached to it – like shells on a rock by the seashore forming a whole incrustation’.¹ In these oceanic terms, the text’s meaning would not be a function of its own internal system, but a function of what John Frow would later refer to as the text’s ‘multiple historicities’: ‘the contradictory modes of its social inscription’ synchronically, as well as its ‘serial reinscriptions’ diachronically.² Not all scholars, however, have shared this enthusiasm for radically historicizing literary enterprise by taking extended voyages through textual pasts. Antony Easthope, for example, has questioned the very feasibility of achieving such a grand materialist vision of literary production. He argues that ‘texts cannot be adequately analysed in relation to a definition of a particular social and historical context’ because they ‘exceed that context not only diachronically, always temporally going beyond a given reading, but also synchronically, always available to *another* reading at the same time, even in the supposedly “original” moment when they were first produced’.³ There is, then, something so elusively excessive about the historical that we can never sufficiently grasp its relation to textuality.

Implicated within this scholarly disagreement is an area of research in media studies particularly devoted to the historical excavation of

1 Tony Bennett, quoting Pierre Macherey, in ‘Text and social process: the case of James Bond’, *Screen Education*, no. 41 (1982), p. 3.

2 John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 187–8.

3 Antony Easthope, *Literary Into Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 113.

meaning. As Bennett and others redefined the object of literary analysis from the text to the intertext – the network of discourses, social institutions, and historical conditions surrounding a work – they helped inspire the development of historical reception studies in film. Those engaged in reception studies typically examine a network of relationships between a film or filmic element (such as a star), adjacent intertextual fields such as censorship, exhibition practices, star publicity and reviews, and the dominant or alternative ideologies of society at a particular time. Such contextual analysis hopes to reveal the intimate impact of discursive and social situations on cinematic meaning, while elaborating the particularities of cinema's existence under different historical regimes from the silent era to the present.

I would like to contemplate an issue raised by Bennett's and Easthope's polarized views of the text/history couplet, specifically as it applies to this kind of film research. The issue has to do with the potential for reception studies to recover adequately a film's past, to reconstruct fully a film's relation to social and historical processes. Can researchers uncover 'everything' which has been written about a film? Can they exhaust the factors involved in the relation between film and history, providing a comprehensive view of the rich contexts that once brought a film to life and gave it meaning for a variety of spectators? Can they, as one scholar exhorts them to do, ask how mass media events 'correspond to the massive data of their origin', so that these events can be 'seized' in their 'totality'?⁴ If not, is the entire enterprise of historical research into film meaning jeopardized, because it can only ever offer partial and therefore historically inadequate views of textual pasts? Totality is of course the utopian goal of those critics seeking 'multiple historicities', and a target of those who advocate doubt. In this sense, the issue of comprehensiveness lingers at the borders of historical reception studies as both a promise and a threat.

4 Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: the Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 216.

5 Paul Ricoeur, *The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 19.

6 Braudel writes that his work covering the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries 'does not claim to have depicted all material life throughout the whole complex world.... What it offers is an attempt to see all these scenes as a whole.... If not to see everything, at least to locate everything, and on the requisite grand scale'. Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), pp. 441–2.

In addition, many philosophers of history would have grave suspicions about any historian claiming comprehensiveness, seeing it as a failure to exercise what Paul Ricoeur refers to as 'epistemological prudence' in historical explanation.⁵ This prudence is made necessary, at the very least, by the scholar's recognition of the interpretive element present in all historical writing and of the always fragmentary and incomplete nature of the historical record itself. Even so, as I will argue, exhaustiveness, while impossible to achieve, is necessary as an ideal goal for historical research. Its impossibility should not lead, as in the case of Easthope, to its dismissal: that would be the rough equivalent of saying because we cannot know all of outer space we should stop our investigations. Rather more in the spirit of Fernand Braudel's concept of *histoire totale*, we can acknowledge both the unattainability of such a history and the benefits of its pursuit.⁶

In a total history, the analyst studies complex interactive

environments or levels of society involved in the production of a particular event, effecting a historical synthesis, an integrated picture of synchronic as well as diachronic change. In Foucauldian terms, total history appears as the general episteme of an archaeological stratum which would include the system of relations between heterogeneous forms of discourse in that stratum. A Marxist gloss defines total history as a 'dialectical history of ceaseless interaction among the political, economic, and cultural, as a result of which the whole society is ultimately transformed'.⁷ Whatever the specific permutation, the grand view behind a *histoire totale* has several valuable functions for film history. Embodying a scholarly aim rather than an absolutely achievable reality, the concept promises to press historians' enquiries beyond established frontiers, broadening the scope of their enterprise, and continually refining their historical methods and perspectives. What David Bordwell refers to in other contexts as a 'a totalized view' of history suggests that recovering the past is eminently tied not only to the discovery of documents of yore, but to reflection upon how best to engage thoroughly with that past.⁸ In addition, pursuing this idea in the context of film studies provides the occasion for imagining what a cinematic version of *histoire totale* might comprise, creating a panoramic view of the contexts most associated with cinema's social and historical conditions of existence, and returning us to the question of what exactly is at stake in materialist approaches to textuality.

Before considering the details of a cinematic *histoire totale* for a dominant kind of filmmaking – the classical Hollywood cinema – I would like to examine briefly how such an enterprise necessarily reorients some existing tendencies of research in reception studies. Keeping in mind that the historians I mention never set out to produce a synthetic social picture, a more global view of a film's reception history raises several questions about the parameters of contemporary contextual research.

The first question pertains to the selection and use of the external discourses the researcher includes in a case study. Some scholars, such as Mike Budd and Maria LaPlace, mobilize a number of different extrafilmic fields to interrogate cinema's relation to its historical context – respectively advertising, censorship, and reviews for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919); and star discourse, conventions of women's fiction, and consumerism for *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942).⁹ The hermeneutic importance of this position becomes clear when we weigh the implications of the 'single discourse' approach to reception. Studying a film's connection to a single external field, such as reviews, is obviously not enough to portray exhaustively the elements involved in a film's social circulation. Such a study can tell us how that field produced meaning for the film and give us a partial view of its discursive surround.¹⁰ But

⁷ Robert Mandrou, quoted in Stoianovich, *French Historical Method*, p. 112.

⁸ David Bordwell, 'Our dream cinema: western historiography and the Japanese film', *Film Reader*, no. 4 (1979), p. 58. I use Bordwell's phrase 'totalized view' because of its suggestiveness for my analysis, while acknowledging that our perspectives on the relations between film and culture differ.

⁹ Mike Budd, 'The moments of *Caligari*', in Mike Budd (ed.), *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 7–11; Maria LaPlace, 'Producing and consuming the woman's film: discursive struggle in *Now, Voyager*', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), pp. 138–66.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Dana Polan for coining the apt phrase 'discursive surround' as a means of describing film's contextual situation.

at the same time, and perhaps less obviously, it can result in an insufficient depiction of film's relationship to its social context, with consequences for how we hypothesize cinema's historical and ideological meaning.

This point finds illustration in Mary Beth Haralovich's commentary on *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955) in which she initially speculates that its mise-en-scene be understood against the 'external social fact of suburbia in the 1950s'. She sees the film as participating in social consciousness about housing and its role in the social order, particularly in its expressive mise-en-scene, which acts potentially to resist 'idealist discourses about the qualities of suburban liveability'. But aware that a single historical frame is insufficient, she suggests further investigating the film's production, the state of domestic architecture, consumerism at the time, and other factors necessary to a more complete social history.¹¹ And, indeed, if one were to look at the industry's production strategies for the style of the film, and reviewers' reception of it against consumerism and other historical tides, one would find that *All That Heaven Allows* was planned and received largely as a support for consumer culture and the affluent climate of the 1950s. The point here is that if the researcher rests with discussing a film's connection to a particular contextual frame, she/he may assess its historical role and ideology too hastily. In this case, such haste might produce a monolithic view of *All That Heaven Allows* as subversive of 1950s domestic ideology by focusing too narrowly on the relation of its self-reflexive mise-en-scene to discourses on housing at the time. By neglecting to consider how the mise-en-scene is situated within broader discursive activities, the researcher's assessment of the film's ideology would be premature.

By contrast, a totalized view provides a sense, not of *the* ideology the text had in historical context, but its *many* ideologies. By placing a film within multifarious intertextual and historical frames – the elements that define its situation in a complex discursive and social milieu – the film's variable, even contradictory, ideological meanings come into focus. There is then a desired *Rashomon*-like effect in totalized reception studies, where the researcher uncovers different historical 'truths' about a film as she/he analyses how it has been deployed within past social relations. A totalized view necessarily addresses the competing voices involved in a particular film's public signification as a means of attempting to describe its full historicity. It thus avoids arriving at premature, partial, ideological identities for films, that result from imposing a unity between a film and its historical moment at the expense of considering the intricate untidiness of this relationship.

Another tendency in historical reception studies forecloses the impulse towards a cinematic *histoire totale* in a different way. Here, the researcher stays too close to home. 'Home' happens to be the film industry, the environment with the closest ties to the film text and the

¹¹ Mary Beth Haralovich, 'Film history and social history', *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1986), pp. 12–13.

one that has long been of interest to historians. On occasion, reception studies focused on the industry fail to raise the question of how the industrial context connects to surrounding social and historical processes. Part of this provincialism results from the debt reception studies owes to the ‘new’ revisionist film history: the former has been revolutionized by the latter’s interest in displacing secondary and anecdotal forms of history with primary documentation, archival research and other historiographical tools of evidence and verification. The new film history has concentrated particularly on industry practices, including modes of production and exhibition, film style and technology. But, as Miriam Hansen has pointed out, this concentration has led at times to a ‘self-imposed abstinence . . . with regard to the social and cultural dynamics of cinematic consumption, with discourses of experience and ideology’.¹²

We can see a distinction between historical accounts emphasizing the industrial and those exploring connections to external social and historical discourses in Lea Jacobs’s and Annette Kuhn’s respective works on film censorship. Jacobs analyses how the operation of censorship affected the style and narrative of the ‘fallen woman’ cycle of the woman’s film from the late 1920s and the 1940s. She illuminates the intricate business of censorship as it attempts to regulate sexual difference in this significant subgenre, but does not extend her analysis to consider its positioning within larger social processes. Kuhn, taking a different tack, contextualizes her discussion of censorship of early British cinema by discussing the eugenics movement, sexology, wartime Britain, and broader conceptions of cinema in the public sphere.¹³ The two authors clearly have different objectives. But for a totalized view, questions of history must extend beyond the industry to engage in a potentially vast system of interconnections, from the film and its immediate industrial context to social and historical developments.

Besides addressing the problems of single discourses and industrial preoccupations, this view demands a diachronic dimension. Almost all film historians are ‘stuck in synchrony’, focusing on the conjuncture in which films initially appeared to reveal their original circumstances of production, exhibition and reception. Reception studies scholars almost exclusively come to terms with a film’s meaning by considering the impact that its original conditions had on its social significance. Research into origins, while all-consuming, can ultimately lapse into a kind of historicism that sidesteps the big meaning question: that is, the radical flux of meaning brought on by changing social and historical horizons over time. Studies of reception can synchronically excavate texts without necessarily speculating on how this context helps reconceive the process of meaning-production – how the act of historicizing challenges notions about the stability of textual meaning. At an extreme, textual exegesis is replaced by historical exegesis. Now, *Voyager* is no longer, via psychoanalytic close readings, a visual

¹² Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 5.

¹³ Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928–1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909–1925* (London: Routledge, 1988).

¹⁴ Lea Jacobs, 'Now, Voyager: some problems of enunciation and sexual difference', *Camera Obscura*, no. 7 (1981), pp. 89–104; LaPlace, 'Producing and consuming the woman's film'.

¹⁵ See Jonathan Culler on this point in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 148.

¹⁶ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 80–81.

essay on sexual difference figuring the potentially liberatory enunciation of woman's desire, but, via historical analysis, a reappropriation of discourses of consumerism as liberatory for women in the 1940s.¹⁴

Without question, historical reception studies has a strong interpretive dimension: the chief arena for the discovery of meaning and significance has in a sense been displaced from text to context.¹⁵ But, as Janet Staiger writes, the prime objective of materialist approaches is not simply to secure new contextualized meanings for texts, but to attempt a 'historical explanation of the event of interpreting a text' by tracing the 'range of [interpretive] strategies available in particular social formations'.¹⁶ Once one makes this meta-interpretive move, questions of value, continuously at the heart of interpretive enterprise, become themselves contextualized. That is, the aesthetic or political value of a film is no longer a matter of its intrinsic characteristics, but of the way those characteristics are deployed by various intertextual and historical forces. A danger of synchronic research is that researchers can find themselves attempting to settle a film's historical meaning, much like a standard interpretation would fix its textual meaning. Ideally, reception theory influenced by cultural and historical materialism analyses, rather, the discontinuities and differences characterizing the uses of a particular film within and beyond its initial appearance. This is not to say that the film in question has no definite historical meanings; simply that what appears to be definite at one moment will be subject to penetrating alterations with the ascendancy of new cultural eras.

Diachronic research is especially important to reception studies, then, because it forces consideration of a film's fluid, changeable and volatile relation to history. These qualifiers are essential for realizing the historicity of meaning beyond origins, and for giving authority to all of the semiotic intrigues surrounding films during the course of their social and historical circulation. The issue of diachrony thus advances the film/culture relation well beyond even 'the massive data of its origins', addressing how that relation is remade continuously through diverse institutions and historical circumstances over the decades subsequent to initial release dates.

The diachronic dimension of Charles Maland's work on Charlie Chaplin, for example, explains how conditions upon the rerelease of this director's films in the 1960s and 1970s helped restore his artistic reputation and star persona, after all of the previous negative publicity stemming from his controversial radicalism and marital mishaps. The changing, more self-critical, political climate of the 1960s and 1970s, combined with auteurism and other transformations in film reviewing and criticism, helped rewrite Chaplin and his films, emphasizing his victimization by Cold War zealots, his artistic genius and his comic persona over his 'Communism' and disastrous relationships. These

¹⁷ Charles Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: the Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), especially pp. 317–60. See also Robert Kapsis's evolutionary treatment of Hitchcock in *Hitchcock: the Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

combined historical factors thus resulted in a new canonization of his works.¹⁷

A cinematic *histoire totale* thus presses against the boundaries of historical reception study by asking at least that researchers analyse public combat over film meaning rather than unities, historicize their enquiries beyond industrial practices, and pursue diachronic meanings not only to better represent the text's social circulation, but to engage fully with the impact historical context has on meaning. It now remains to ask: what might a cinematic version of *histoire totale* look like?

Before getting to the heart of the matter, a few words about the parameters of this account are in order. Because classical Hollywood cinema has been centre stage for a great deal of work in historical reception studies, my discussion here will pertain primarily to this kind of film. I will address the contextual factors involved in negotiating the meaning of films made in Hollywood roughly between 1917 and 1960 – the so-called classical period in US filmmaking. Though the model I propose may have application to other modes of production (such as documentary and avant-garde film), other national cinemas and visual communications media (such as television), I do not suggest that a total history for one particular kind of filmmaking, no matter how dominant, somehow comprehensively represents others.¹⁸

I have divided a total history for this kind of film into two large categories: the synchronic and diachronic. The more specific subdivisions under the synchronic are organized in a progressively outward-bound direction, beginning with those areas most closely associated with the production of a film ('cinematic practices'), moving to those technically outside the industry, but closely affiliated with a film's appearance ('intertextual zones'), and ending with social and historical contexts circulating through and around its borders. As we shall see, while each of these areas still apply, the peculiarities of the diachronic dimension dictate a slightly different organization.

These subdivisions are so labelled to maintain familiar distinctions between contextual areas typically explored by researchers. I do not mean to deny the intertextuality and discursivity of all that surrounds the film, as well as the film itself: but for the purposes of clarity in discussion, I wish to avoid collapsing everything contextual into a single, chaotic identity. These three subdivisions – cinematic practices, intertextual zones, and social and historical contexts – depict a geographic space which suggests the intricate situations in which cinema exists historically. Of course, not all of these regions may be equally important to each film analysed. The researcher attempts to discover which regions seem particularly applicable to reconstructing the vital relations which comprise the contexts in which particular films are produced and received.

¹⁸ Some examples of work in reception studies on other modes of production include: Juan Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943–1971* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). In the area of other national cinemas, see Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality*; Kyoko Hirano, *Mr Smith Goes to Tokyo Under the American Occupation, 1945–1952* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); and Jostein Gripsrud and Kathrine Skretting (eds.), *History of Moving Images: Reports from a Norwegian Project* (Oslo: Research Council of Norway, 1994). Since television and film are such different media, I could not simply equate the two. However, reception studies in film have much to learn from similar enquiries in television studies.

In addition, the nature of interrelations between various areas is deeply interactive. The film in question, for example, is not just *acted upon* by external forces, it in turn can affect and transform the contextual activities which surround it – as, for example, when controversy over a film's censorship results in changes in censorship codes or public debate about the regulation of media content. Similarly, the relations between an aspect of cinematic practice, such as film style or exhibition, to intertextual zones and historical contexts are not to be understood as ultimately separable, but as fluid and reciprocal: for example, the lushness of 1950s Technicolor melodramatic mise-en-scène in Hollywood is linked intertextually to decors shown in *Better Homes and Gardens* within the overall spectacle of postwar consumer culture.¹⁹ In this example, intertexts and history penetrate the films' visuals at the same time as those visuals continue to construct a utopian vision of consumption. By imagining such reciprocity between areas, we can see historically how film and its contexts act as participants in the discursive fray of which they are a part.

A reception history aimed at a totalized view, then, would ask how the factors within these general areas helped reconstruct the historical conditions of existence for a film at the moment of its first and subsequent releases. However, researchers in reception are not primarily interested in these conditions *per se*, as some film historians might be. Rather, those pursuing issues of reception interrogate such contextual elements to understand how they helped negotiate the film's social meanings and public reception, attempting to pinpoint the meanings in circulation at a given historical moment.

It is important to point out that the viewer in this semantic geography is everywhere and nowhere, neither the product nor the subject of one particular discourse.²⁰ The viewer does not exist in one stable location in relation to the flux of historical meanings around a film, and therefore cannot be placed conveniently at the centre, the periphery or some other 'niche' within this interaction. Thus, a total history does not tell us (except in the case of empirical research on fans and spectators) how specific individuals responded to films: it cannot generally 'pin' the viewer down as subject to a series of discursive manoeuvres. Instead, it provides a sense of what the historical prospects were for viewing at a given time by illuminating the meanings made available within that moment. A totalized perspective thus depicts how social forces invite viewers to assume positions, giving us a range of possible influences on spectatorship, without securing an embodied viewer. As a result, this depiction is not 'subject free', but underpinned by the assumption that social discourses recruit and depend on social subjects to support them.

Below is a schematic account of the more specific factors that enter into a total history for the classical Hollywood cinema. Many of these have been individually identified as relevant to understanding the

¹⁹ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 57–68.

²⁰ See Michel Foucault's discussion of subjectivity in relation to discursivity in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 200. Foucault does not wish to exclude the problem of the subject, but to 'define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse'.

historicity of the cinema. Taken together, they begin to provide a sense of the magnitude of a total reception history of a film.

Synchronic areas of study

Cinematic practices

These are primarily all of the practices associated with film production, distribution and exhibition that shape the film the audience finally sees. At the same time, they generate all sorts of materials, from studio memos to posters, that allow the historian to grasp their struggles over how the film should ultimately signify to audiences to make a profit. As a ‘meaning-making’ institution generally responsible for first introducing the film to the public, the industry represents a powerful source with which to historicize the impact one contextual arena had on creating ‘preferred’ readings for films.

Film Production What factors within this arena affected the ultimate constitution of the film(s) in question? Research here might focus on how the economic structure and production practices of a studio during a specific historical period helped shape the film product. How did that studio’s house style govern the selection of producers, directors, stars, scriptwriters and other personnel? How did it influence the genre, narrative and style of its product (for example, as the post-sound expansion, Depression-era thrift of Warner Bros contributed to the ‘direct from the headlines’ stories, sparse mise-en-scene and similarly functional cinematography, editing, sound, scriptwriting, and so on, of their cycle of ‘realist’ gangster and social problem films in the early 1930s)? Research would in addition consider technological developments in so far as they affect film style (arc lights, Technicolor, widescreen formats, and so on). Also fundamentally involved in the production process is film censorship, specifically the negotiations between studios, state and/or film industry censors and special interest groups over the content and form of motion pictures. These negotiations, as historians have shown, result in battles over, and potential changes in, virtually any aspect of a film from its dialogue to its ending.

The analyst, then, provides a production history for the film being studied, seeking to grasp how its narrative and style were negotiated by industry factors and developments affecting industry practices. In such an analysis, new film histories involving Hollywood provide formative models for this aspect of reception study.²¹

Film Distribution How was the film in question distributed nationally and internationally, affecting where and under what conditions it appeared theatrically? While there are many possible applications here,

²¹ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger’s *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) has stood as a tutor-text of new film historicism. In addition, scholars such as Tino Balio and Tom Schatz have afforded insight into the impact studio affiliation has had on individual motion pictures in terms of house style and other considerations. See Balio, *United Artists: the Company Built By the Stars* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) and Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). Studies of film technology, such as John Belton’s work on widescreen, as well as studies of censorship, such as Lea Jacobs’s work, demonstrate, respectively, how technology and the film industry’s moral considerations deeply influenced the appearance of certain films. See John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin*.

one example emerges from Douglas Gomory's work on the domestic distribution tactics of the 'Big Five' studios during the classic era. As he has shown, the distribution exchanges of these studios helped maintain a strict pattern of exhibition for films as 'first', 'second' or 'clearance' runs within certain kinds of cinemas and geographical territories. Clearly a profit-motivated strategy on the part of the studios, such definitions of venues for films helped define the cinemagoing attitudes of patrons toward these films (for example, seeing a much anticipated blockbuster with big name stars during its first week of release at top admission prices as opposed to seeing it months or years later with far less fanfare, in less glamorous cinemas and at a bargain price).²²

²² Douglas Gomory, *Shared Pleasures: a History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 66–9. For other texts that treat distribution practices, see Thomas H. Guback, *The International Film Industry: Western Europe and America Since 1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) and Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–34* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).

Film Exhibition A particularly rich terrain for considering the industry's impact on the public presentation of a film, there are at least three central areas to examine here: national exhibition, local exhibition and the cinema site itself.

Materials the studio uses in national exhibition range from trailers, posters and lobby cards shown in or adorning cinemas, to nationally broadcast star interviews and tie-ins with major businesses such as General Motors, or, more recently, McDonald's. The researcher considers how the ephemera around the release of a film – trailers, posters and tie-ins – contribute to its social identity. Trailers, for example, obviously indicate how a studio wishes to sell a film. At the same time, the sales strategies used tell us how the film was semiotically presented to its potential audiences – that is, how the studios foregrounded certain of its aspects to appeal to industry and social trends of the time (as when studio trailers amplified the 'illicit' sexual content of 1950s Hollywood melodramas to sell them as representatives of the increasing 'sexual display' within 1950s culture).²³ Tactics and materials used by local cinema owners and managers to sell films to their particular demographic audiences include specially designed posters, as well as such exploitation devices as product giveaways or star lookalike contests. These materials again help indicate how meanings for films can be motivated: a star lookalike contest emphasizes not only the particular star as commodity and the forces of identification between star and audiences already at work, but also reifies the film as spectacle of genderized glamour and visual appeal, among other things.²⁴ Lastly, the design, location and other features of the cinema site itself constitute significant determinants of the filmgoing experience. Trends affecting the exhibition site, such as the development of the picture palace with its grand architecture, the introduction of air conditioning, concession stands, double features and many other theatrical innovations, create 'framing' devices that strongly interact with the phenomenon of viewing, affecting the historical apprehension of films.²⁵

²³ Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, pp. 36–57.

²⁴ Diane Waldman treats this aspect of exploitation gimmickry in 'From midnight shows to marriage vows: woman, exploitation, and exhibition'. *Wide Angle*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1984), pp. 40–48.

²⁵ Gomory, *Shared Pleasures*, pp. 57–82.

Film Personnel While this category belongs both to production and exhibition, its significance to the social circulation of a film merits separate attention. The studio's choice of actors, scriptwriters, directors, producers, and so on has a lively impact on a film's social appropriation via the studio's circulation of stories in the print and visual media about those personnel. While the director is often considered the most important of these personnel, these background stories, interviews and gossip items often feature stars, scriptwriters, original source authors and others involved in the making of a film. Such discussions are often intended to incite greater interest in the film among cinemagoers and to guide audiences to preferred reading(s) the production company may have in mind. A contemporary instance would be interviews with stars Demi Moore and Michael Douglas in which they try to steer the viewer away from seeing *Disclosure* (Barry Levinson, 1994) as a backlash film about sexual harassment. Hence what Terry Eagleton once called authorial ideology²⁶ does not simply apply to the primary author, but, within the collective enterprise of filmmaking, potentially to all those involved in the process. Various personnel's biographies, commentaries and reported worldviews become part of the public's structuring principles for viewing films.

Among works attempting synthetic production histories for specific films which touch on many of the above considerations (though not necessarily from a reception studies perspective) is Stephen Rebello's *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*.²⁷

Intertextual zones

These zones mainly acknowledge cinema's relation to other media and businesses, the mutual influences between film and associated practices external to the film industry. These include such influences as adaptation from an original source or reference to conventions from preexisting forms that entered into the audience's experience of film, as in the case of vaudeville's impact on early cinema audiences in the USA. For reception studies these intertextual situations are particularly important in helping to depict further formative influences on the film text itself, sets of expectations or desires audience members may have brought to their filmgoing from their participation in other adjacent spheres, and modes of evaluation other media may have brought to bear on the cinema at specific times. Hence, studying the film's association with closely related terrains illuminates just how strongly intertextual its existence is, as this provides another step in reconstructing its historical meaning.

Other Businesses and Industries These would include fashion, advertising, the car industry, fast food, and myriad other businesses that have served not only on occasion as models for Hollywood enterprise, but also as rich sources of tie-ins for film promotion,

²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978), pp. 58–60.

²⁷ Stephen Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

publicity, and exploitation. These external influences, as in the case of fashion, have the power to influence the film's visuals, as well as provide a strategy of appeal to viewers. Productive research in this area that targets the tie-in includes Jane Gaines's work on *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933) where Gaines traces the strategies used by US department stores to sell versions of the film's costumes against the historical backdrop of the development of the department store window and cinema screen as spectacles of consumer luxuries.²⁸

²⁸ Jane Gaines, 'The *Queen Christina* tie-ups: convergence of show window and screen', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1989), pp. 35–60.

Other Media and Arts The performing arts, popular media, and 'high' art forms comprise a vital intertextual environment in which films are made and viewed. Thus vaudeville, radio, comic strips, pulp fiction, bestselling novels, television, music, 'classic' literature, theatre, painting, dance and opera are all potential influences on films and their reception. Such forms serve, most familiarly, as sources of adaptation (for instance, MGM's adaptation of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* [George Cukor, 1935]). But they can also affect the film industry's economic decisions (when, for example, a studio decides to make 'A' productions to maintain or gain a first-run market by producing prestige pictures based on classic literature). In addition, media intertexts deeply affect film style: one can think here of the impact of the sharp repartee of Raymond Chandler's literary noir characters on acting styles and dialogue in film noir or the pervasive presence of music video's rapid editing style in a variety of media from advertisements to film today.

Through their characters, conventions, genres, and styles, forms external to cinema create horizons of expectation for their audiences as well, shaping how they view the cinema. Film historians have written extensively about the influence vaudeville had on film – how, specifically, vaudevillian stage acts helped determine the narrative and exhibition strategies of the early US film, and the expectations of its emerging audiences.²⁹ As for a less examined intertextual alliance, Gaylyn Studlar has argued that developments in dance (such as European-influenced art dance and the tango) shaped the textual features of Rudolph Valentino's films and the star's public reception via the controversial vision of masculinity these dance forms suggested.³⁰

Review Journalism This refers to film criticism that appears in newspapers, magazines, radio and television. As Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery comment, such criticism helps establish the terms by which films will be discussed and evaluated in public.³¹ By illuminating the critical standards and tastes within the aesthetic ideologies and social preoccupations of a given historical moment, the study of review journalism reveals a great deal about the terms governing a film's cultural circulation.

²⁹ For a work that analyses other intertextual influences on early cinema, including Shakespearian drama, see William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, *Reframing Culture: the Case of Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³⁰ Gaylyn Studlar, 'Valentino, "optic intoxication," and dance madness', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 23–45.

³¹ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 90.

Star Journalism and Fan Culture Stories about stars appear in numerous sources, including women's and fan magazines, tabloids, tell-all biographies and television. Like studio-generated materials about stars, which often cross over into this arena, star stories as they circulate in the wider culture are vital to an understanding of the social semiotics of the celebrity image in conjunction with the celebrity's roles and what she or he might signify to various social groups. Richard Dyer's work on Marilyn Monroe, Paul Robeson and Judy Garland in *Heavenly Bodies* has influentially demonstrated the significance of such forms of intertextuality in understanding how these stars signified, respectively, white female sexuality, blackness and gay iconicity, within specific historical circumstances.³²

³² Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986).

Social and historical contexts

Although cinematic practices and intertextual zones occupy distinct spheres with their own respective operations, they not only intersect with one another but also interact with social and historical developments. This category attempts to come to terms with a series of larger social processes which, in concert with cinematic practices and intertextual zones, help produce meanings for films. Below are a series of admittedly large terrains which suggest aspects of the social formation involved in the complex negotiation of what films mean publicly.

The Economy The cinematic institution, its practices and its alliances with other media and businesses can be associated with economic considerations within any conjuncture (for example, the rise of transnational corporations in the 1960s and their effect on creating what Thomas Schatz has called the 'blockbuster syndrome' in Hollywood filmmaking in the 1970s).³³ Film historians have also frequently emphasized the relationship between consumerism and the cinema by analysing a series of connections between historical eras emphasizing consumerism, the fashion and advertising industries, film style (including decor and costumes), exhibition practices and the female consumer.³⁴

³³ Thomas Schatz, 'The new Hollywood', in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (eds), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 8–36.

³⁴ Charles Eckert's early work has spawned a small cottage industry on this subject. See 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's window', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1978): pp. 1–21.

Law Here the analyst places a film, related cinematic practices, and intertextual zones within the framework of legal rulings. As in the other areas, the applications are potentially as broad as the category itself and depend on the film's specific historical situation. Researchers of US film history might explore the relationship between film censorship and regulations on obscenity from the municipal to Supreme Court levels. On completely different fronts, they may investigate the impact local or federal rules regarding city planning, zoning and housing (such as post-World War II practices of red and green lining) had on film exhibition or how import-export trends affected film exhibition and film culture. As Janet Staiger has pointed

³⁵ Staiger, *Interpreting Films*, pp. 178–95.

out, the influx of foreign films into the USA after World War II influenced standards of review journalism applied to domestic films, helping to put a premium on cinematic realism and mature themes.³⁵

Religion Religious groups or trends can affect the production, public circulation and reception of specific films. The strong involvement, from the earliest moments of the history of the medium up to the present day, of religious interests in film censorship and in firing the public imagination about the immorality of certain films are well documented. In addition, there are magazines with religious affiliations which review films, such as the Catholic sources *Commonweal* and *America*, tying religion to the intertextual circumstances of reception.

Politics Scholars have long linked films with political developments, ranging from turn-of-the-century US policies on immigration to the Reaganism of the 1980s. For example, critics have chronicled the government's greater influence on Hollywood during World War II, an influence resulting in films that supported such official platforms as national unity and equality.³⁶ They have also shown how, in the period directly following the war, these platforms helped inspire Hollywood to make a series of 'conscience liberal' films addressing antisemitism and racism in the USA.³⁷ A total history would relate film and its discursive context to the political climate, government policies, legislation and other factors involved in political history on national and local levels.

Class Class relations permeate films and their discursive surrounds in numerous ways, including the division of labour within the studio system itself, and representation of class and class conflicts within films. Familiar examples of this latter case are the working-class musicals and gangster films produced by Warner Bros in the early 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression, an economic crisis that precipitated a reassessment of class relations in the USA. Jane Gaines has also examined how the narrative and characters of a 'race' film, *Scar of Shame* (Frank Peregini, 1927), appealed to the class constituency of the urban African-American audience of the time, as well as the attitudes of that audience towards racial caste.³⁸ Debates about early US cinema have demonstrated the central role played by the class status of film patrons in the evolution of film narrative and patterns of exhibition. The factor of class, then, ranges in its effects from the economic structure of the film industry to the demography of its audiences.

Race and Ethnicity Similarly, the social constitution of ethnic and racial identities broadly affects the cinema. One can think here of the neonativist movement in the 1920s that demonized ethnic others. As Miriam Hansen has shown, this movement helped shape a deeply

³⁶ See, for example, Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

³⁷ Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: the Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁸ Jane Gaines, 'The Scar of Shame: skin color and caste in black silent melodrama', in Marcia Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 331–48.

³⁹ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, pp. 245–68.

⁴⁰ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, pp. 67–139.

ambivalent public reception of Rudolph Valentino, whose films strongly amplified his ethnic otherness and ‘exoticism’.³⁹ As mentioned, the postwar development of ‘race liberalism’ spawned a series of race films in Hollywood, including *Home of the Brave* (Mark Robson, 1949). In addition, Richard Dyer has argued that Paul Robeson’s image was influenced by public conceptions of folk culture, atavism and the African–American male body from the 1920s to the 1940s.⁴⁰ In each of these cases, social attitudes toward race and ethnicity, as well as the perspectives of the racial or ethnic group itself, penetrate films and their discursive surrounds, helping to negotiate the terms of reception.

Gender and Sexual Difference Researchers have amply chronicled the relationship between social developments constituting definitions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality and the cinema. There is, for example, the rise of ‘sexual liberalism’ in the USA of the 1950s due to a host of factors, including the release of the Alfred Kinsey reports on male and female sexuality. The publication of *Playboy* magazine in the early 1950s escalated the atmosphere of sexual display and helped define the appeal of a succession of blonde bombshells on the screen, including Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield and Mamie Van Doren.⁴¹ During the same historical moment, the greater visibility of gays after World War II led to a series of Hollywood films concerning homosexuality, including *Tea and Sympathy* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956) and *Suddenly, Last Summer* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1959). In the postwar era these and other forces, such as the powerful image of the nuclear family, defined gender and sexuality in multiple ways. In any era, representations of gender and sexuality respond to such social developments and discourses as they attempt to establish standards of deviant and normal sexuality and appropriate sex roles. As in the categories above, the appeals made by films and their circumstances of exhibition to specific demographic audiences also occur in relation to gender (as, for example, in the case of the production of women’s films or promotion strategies aimed at the housewife). In addition, research into the impact of class, race and gender on film reception can engage in empirical/ethnographic studies of particular audience reactions to the cinema.

Family Reception studies can also examine the social forces affecting the family’s definition during specific historical moments. For example, in the USA there was a shift in ideal family configurations from the extended urban ethnic family to the white middle-class nuclear family immediately after World War II. This was due in part to the demands of an expanding consumer economy which required consuming units like the suburban family for growth. Films such as *I Remember Mama* (George Stevens, 1948) and *Marty* (Delbert Mann, 1955) attempted to negotiate this shift in response to changing ideals.⁴²

⁴¹ For a discussion of the rise of sexual liberalism in the 1950s, see John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 239–74; for a connection between *Playboy* magazine and the blonde bombshell, see Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, pp. 19–66.

⁴² George Lipsitz discusses this shift in relation to the television situation comedy in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 39–96.

Discourses about the family circulating in the social formation thus describe its ideal configurations, its crises and its inadequacies. Reception theorists can study the impact historical definitions of the family have had on the film industry (where the family has served as a target audience and marketing focus for certain productions), on the intertextual zones surrounding the film, and on the representations of the family in specific films as they participate in social dialogues about the state of the family during a given era.

Ideology Few researchers in reception studies continue to employ a classic Marxist or Althusserian concept of dominant ideology in their discussions of film and context. In light of the work of Raymond Williams, Foucault and Gramsci, scholars often treat the historical moment as an ensemble of discourses, from the filmic to the social, that exist within a contested ideological space in the throes of uneven development. Research on cinema and the public sphere, in particular, has emphasized the necessity of a non-reductive approach to cinema and ideology. Miriam Hansen, for example, theorizes cinema's place within a 'contested field of multiple positions and conflicting interests'. Annette Kuhn also argues that, as cinema actively participates within the production of 'certain discursive positions', it does so in 'a complex and contradictory manner', because meanings 'may vary according to circumstance'.⁴³ A totalized view thus looks at the instabilities of the historical moment, its assembly of conflicting voices. At the same time, such a view considers the manner in which films are differently appropriated within the social formation by potentially contradictory ideological interests. A total history seeks to avoid reductively equating a text with an ideology (where the text is either reactionary or subversive). Researchers attempt instead to depict the many ideological interests that intersect with a film during its public circulation and to engage as fully as possible the range of its social meanings within its historical moment.

Crosscultural Reception Another dimension of a film's 'meaningful' existence is its reception in foreign countries. Inquiries into crosscultural reception activate the areas already mentioned, but these areas need to be reconsidered with the specificity of the national culture in mind. Crosscultural analyses have perhaps a more established place in studies of contemporary television,⁴⁴ but scholars have begun to explore this aspect of a film's reception as well. Jackie Stacey writes of the enormous appeal female Hollywood stars had for British women in the 1940s and 1950s, in part because Hollywood's glamour and displays of wealth attracted an audience accustomed to wartime deprivations in goods. Similarly, Helen Taylor analyses how women in Britain and the southern United States read and viewed *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), an indisputable 'classic' in both literature and cinema, through the screens of their indigenous

⁴³ Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 7; Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ See, for example, this recent crosscultural study: Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴⁵ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994); Helen Taylor, *Scarlett's Women: Gone With the Wind and Its Female Fans* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

cultural, historical, and personal preoccupations.⁴⁵ Such perspectives emphasize how malleable film meaning is by demonstrating the difference national contexts make to how texts are appropriated.

Diachronic areas of study

While considering a film in relation to cinematic practices, intertextual zones, and social and historical contexts is still relevant to discussing diachronic dimensions of meaning, some adjustments in these categories are necessary. Prime among these is a shift in the definition of what I have previously called cinematic practices. Since films often exist in surrogate form in their post-origin appearances – that is, in broadcast, video, laserdisc and other new technology formats – the industry practices involved in producing, distributing and exhibiting films from the past are no longer contained within the studio system, but include the operations of other forums. For example, while a production company or studio now often manufactures laser versions of its films, on occasion companies that sell laserdiscs, such as Voyager (a joint venture with Criterion-Janus Films), have produced their own lasers in league with film distributors who have the rights to certain titles.⁴⁶ In addition, contemporary exhibition of classic Hollywood films is subject to the institutional practices of art museums, retrospective houses, academic classrooms, broadcast and cable stations, video stores, and other venues through which ‘old’ films now have a public existence. Thus, the category of cinematic practices must be reconsidered more generally as a conglomeration of media industry and associated practices.

While these various practices afford film a new public presence, they also produce certain intertextual commentaries to create significations for a cinematic text far removed from those defining its origins. Since these practices and intertextual zones are most visibly active in the reappearance and circulation of classic era films through new moments in history, I will consider them in concert by focusing on several significant ways in which Hollywood films are resuscitated for contemporary audiences. To approach a totalized view adequately, the practices described below require more detail, particularly in regard to the specificity of the means of production, distribution, and exhibition employed by the various involved industries. Since film and its discursive surround act symbiotically with social and historical developments to create arenas of reception for a film, these practices and intertexts would need to be positioned in relation to these developments as well.

I intend what follows, then, as a suggestive mapping of terrains significant to the diachronic study of the classic film, rather than an exhaustive discussion. Clearly, more research is needed on the intricacies of the diachronic life of this type of cinema.

Practices and zones

Revivals and Retrospectives Films from the past appear in revival houses (particularly in the 1960s and 1970s); in retrospectives held in such venues as art museums, film festivals and archives; and through gala special screenings of restored, previously censored, forgotten or rare films (for example, the early 1980s big screen rereleases of several of Alfred Hitchcock's films, including *Rear Window* [1954] and *Vertigo* [1958], after they had been out of 35mm distribution for many years). Reception theorists can gauge the new meanings generated for a film by weighing the impact the particular exhibition site (revival house or art museum) has on reception. Other elements that come into play include: accompanying materials such as programme notes, newspaper advertisements and commentary from film or 'art scene' reviewers; the state of alternative filmgoing at the moment of revival; and relevant aspects of the moment itself.

Reviews Reviewers comment directly on revived films, evaluating them against whatever aesthetic canons dominate journalism at the time to renovate the films' appeal for new audiences within existing systems of professional taste and social and aesthetic ideologies. A striking feature of review aesthetics in the USA in the 1970s, for example, was a penetrating nostalgia for classic Hollywood films and their auteurs, including Frank Capra, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock and Douglas Sirk. Reviewers touted the originality and artistry of these filmmakers' works to strike a contrast with what was perceived as the greater commercialism of New Hollywood films. This nostalgia led to lavish praise for such films from the classic era as *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, 1939) and *Written on the Wind* (Douglas Sirk, 1956) and helped extend the force of auteurism from the academy into the popular press. In any case, from popularly canonized works such as *Gone With the Wind* and *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) to the more obscure, films from the past are routinely mentioned and often evaluated in newspapers and magazines, guidebooks to films on television and video, film encyclopedias in print and CD-Rom formats, and books about the making of a particular work (including Janet Leigh's *Psycho*, a recent behind-the-scenes book on Hitchcock's film).

Academic Theory, Criticism, and History This is one of the regions most prolific in remotivating the meaning of films via contemporary institutions and perspectives. As David Bordwell has exhaustively elaborated, academic interpretation operates with its own set of protocols and conventions to make films signify.⁴⁷ Like revivals and retrospectives, academia constructs assessments that differ dramatically from any the film may have earned in its original context. We can see how shifts in academic protocols of interpretation, as well as such theoretical and critical developments as auteurism, semiotics,

⁴⁷ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴⁸ For an interesting essay on the academic construction of the avant garde, see Gregory T. Taylor, 'The cognitive instrument in the service of revolutionary change': Sergei Eisenstein, Annette Michelson, and the avant garde's scholarly aspiration', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1992), pp. 42–59.

⁴⁹ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ Perhaps here undertaking a cinematic version of David Morley's work in *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Routledge, 1986).

psychoanalysis, feminism and the new film history, affect transformations of cinematic meaning through time within the institution itself.⁴⁸

Broadcast, Satellite, and Cable Television It is impossible to account for a film's reception each and every time it is broadcast on television. However, scholars can begin to address the phenomenon of rebroadcast by looking at specific cases and historical situations. As one instance of this kind of research, Robert Ray has written about how the massive broadcast of classic Hollywood films on US television in the 1950s and 1960s helped create an audience steeped in the conventions of Hollywood narratives, thus paving the way for the self-conscious and at times parodic products of the New American Cinema within the 'revolutionary' context of the era.⁴⁹ Researchers might also consider how specific television channels attempt to define a film for consumption. Each channel seems to have a particular 'persona' in its presentation of films, whether it be an archival sensibility which presents the film as a classic or an irreverent 'kitschy' format which updates the entertainment value of an old film through parody.

Any consideration of this diachronic dimension of a film's life would also need to theorize the effects of watching films on television, where they are inserted into the US home and into a particular social formation.⁵⁰ In any case, by examining the impact of exhibiting films on television, researchers address the factors that influenced the ways in which films were substantially 're-viewed' by audiences in one of the most influential of post-film media.

Video and Laserdisc Reproduction Like television broadcast, the release of films on video and laserdisc constitutes a major contemporary forum for viewing which reception studies should address. These formats represent a completely different mode of reproduction and exhibition, one which engages specific media industry practices as well as a transformed viewing situation. There are many different kinds of issues to be raised here: they include the technologies and business practices involved in the development and institution of these new formats, as well as the film classification or commentary used by video stores, laserdisc packagers and surrounding media that orient the viewer towards the film in question. How, for example, are laserdiscs marketed to their audiences in speciality magazines such as *Widescreen Review*? How do the special editions of films appearing on laser – which come with extended commentary from critics, directors and stars, as well as guidelines for using the film for 'study purposes' – reconfigure a film's identity and reception? In further examining the implications of laser and video for reception, what of the possibility these formats present to re-view films frequently? And, to ask the most difficult question, what role do video

or laser reproductions of films play within the social interactions, larger patterns of consumption, and historical developments that circle around the film/viewer relationship during a particular diachronic moment?

Fan Culture On its first appearance, a film's stars may very well have a coterie of fans or fan clubs. But as critics such as Helen Taylor have shown, fan culture extends well beyond the original moments of reception, lingering long afterwards to solidify group identity around media products, as well as develop or dispute certain reading strategies.⁵¹ This is then a powerful region for considering how the media may be reactivated over time by specific groups with particular social identities and interpretive agendas. It also allows scholars to study how rereading, even to the extreme of fetishized rereading, affects individual media products. As recent work by Henry Jenkins has suggested, contemporary fan culture solicits consideration of the role played by new technologies, such as computer networks and lists, in creating, maintaining and disseminating textual identities far removed from the 'official' readings offered by the production company in question.⁵²

⁵¹ Taylor, *Scarlett's Women*.

⁵² Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); also Taylor, *Scarlett's Women*.

The Biographical Legend Much of the commentary involved in the above areas helps constitute 'biographical legends' for various personnel, legends that deeply affect contemporary meanings for past artefacts. The biographical legend of film personnel begins in the synchronic moment, but through the cumulative effects of time achieves potentially its biggest impact on meaning. In studies of Chaplin and Hitchcock, Maland and Robert Kapsis have respectively shown how each director's reputation – constructed through such varied sources as his films, production companies, the mass media and academia – affects the reception of his work in contemporary contexts. The creation and re-creation of the author's personal and creative 'legend' through time (for example, Hitchcock as entertainer, Catholic auteur, moralist, subversive and sexual obsessive from the 1950s to the present) dovetails with both journalistic and academic enterprises. At the same time, it relates to developments in cultural history (for instance, after years of political exile, Chaplin was belatedly embraced by cinephiles within a more radical 1960s and 1970s US culture). As in the synchronic dimension of film meaning, biographical legends are not created solely in relation to film directors, but also pertain to other film 'authors', including screenwriters, composers, cinematographers and, particularly, stars. Rock Hudson serves as one of the most dramatic recent examples of how revelations about a star's identity occurring well after the appearance of his films affect their contemporary reception. In 1985, the public disclosure of Hudson's AIDS diagnosis and homosexual lifestyle caused a radical shift in his legendary heterosexual screen identity, retrospectively interfering with the seamless sexuality of his past roles.⁵³

⁵³ For more on Hudson's iconic shift, see Richard Meyer, 'Rock Hudson's body', in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 259–88.

Crosscultural reception Like US revivals, foreign film festivals, retrospectives and screenings can reactivate old US films for reception in different national contexts and historical situations. Scotland's Edinburgh Film Festival and England's National Film Theatre, for example, boosted the cause of auteurism in the 1970s with respect to such directors as Frank Tashlin and Douglas Sirk by organizing programmes devoted to their films. Such revivals of classic Hollywood films abroad occur constantly. The screenings at the Action Rive-Gauche and Action Ecoles theatres in Paris specialize in new prints of old classics, while French art houses feature mini-revivals of various US directors' films. Classic Hollywood films also appear more bountifully in other national contexts through their broadcast on television and distribution on videotape and laserdisc. When studying these crossnational resuscitations of US films, researchers must also take into account potentially all of the other diachronic issues mentioned above. In addition, there are questions peculiar to this kind of reception, such as the country's contemporary relations with the United States, as well as its own cultural, historical, and national characteristics.

A total history, in conclusion, may well be an impossible enterprise. But as I have argued, pursuing a fleet of 'multiple historicities' excites reflection on the practices of reception theory in necessary ways. At the same time, it emphasizes vexing problems which are already very much a part of film historiography. How does the historian conceive of the interactions between text and history? How does the historian establish relations between the different phenomena she or he sets out to describe? Is there an ultimate determination of, or hierarchy in, relations between levels (a question aggravated especially by post-Marxist thought with its attack on the classic base/superstructure model)? What is the researcher's working conception of history?

Somewhat paradoxically, by showing us impossible vistas a totalized view reveals how all manner of semiotic baggage encumbers textuality in its public existence. And by raising difficult questions, it reinforces the need to attend to the fine points of historiography. In addition, we cannot expect any single approach to solve all of the mysteries of the text/ideology relationship, nor will we find any that do not need to perform a critique of their own basic terms and assumptions. Both text-based and context-based criticism find that their ultimate object – the text – eventually eludes their grasp, transformed by new critical paradigms, new information and other events endemic to the passage of time and the 'natural' rhythms of revisionism within the academy as well as in the surrounding culture.

Bringing this point to bear specifically on film history, this state of affairs does not lead inescapably to absolute relativism and cynicism about historical research. As Tony Bennett writes, it does not necessarily follow that 'because we cannot establish certain

propositions as absolutely true . . . we have no means of establishing their provisional truth – of determining that they meet conditions which justify our regarding them as true and so as capable of serving as a basis for both further thought and action'. History as a discipline provides some of these conditions through its protocols of investigation that help regulate standards of evidence and verification. The 'evidential standing' of historical facts must pass at the very least the 'test of disciplinary scrutiny'.⁵⁴ The 'quality controls' on historical research exercised through its disciplinary institution do not guarantee truth, but they do promote rigour in making propositions about the past, which are the best possible at the time of writing.

In addition, there is much at stake in the writing of history, in giving the past a future.⁵⁵ The knowledge propagated by a historical account becomes part of the social fabric. It enters into the competition over what the past signifies to contemporary culture and thus attains a political dimension as it manoeuvres to reawaken concepts of the past to serve the present: note how politicians have used a certain image of the 1950s to support their call for a return to 'family values' in the 1980s and 1990s. With their focus on primary documents in relation to such issues as gender, race and class, reception histories enable us to rethink the past. Because what they find demonstrates the complicated heterogeneity of the past, they can combat the kind of monolithic summaries that usually characterize public accounts of bygone eras. These histories can thus make the past useful in current political struggles over social issues. In this sense, the changeability of the past is not so much a liability as a significant register of the activity of conflicting and competing ideological interests: in this situation, not having a voice in interpreting history can mean the silencing of contestation.

Despite the endless complexity of issues involved in considering a total history, this is not to say, finally, that such a history need be interminable. Like Freud's model of psychoanalytic therapy, film history is both terminable and interminable. Paraphrasing Freud, the analysis can be ended appropriately when the historian has secured the best possible explanation for the functioning of a historical moment.⁵⁶ But, in theory, it could extend indefinitely, because of the vastness of the enterprise – the difficulty of detecting all of the complicating factors involved in the past – but also because of the unpredictable concerns of the present and the future which continue to animate and otherwise affect the events of the past. The point is not to abandon the enterprise, but to deepen it by confronting its difficulties, securing historical writing as a vigorously self-reflective activity.

⁵⁴ Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 55–6. On this issue, see also David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Linearity, materialism, and the study of early American cinema', *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1983), pp. 4–15.

⁵⁵ As Raymond Aron writes, 'The past is never definitely fixed except when it has no future'. 'Relativism in history', in Hans Meyerhoff (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), p. 158.

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Analysis terminable and interminable', in *Therapy and Technique* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 268. (From his 1937 essay 'Die endliche und unendliche Analyse'.)

The melodramatic imagination of Detlef Sierck: *Final Chord* and its resonances

SABINE HAKE

Writings on the films of Detlef Sierck/Douglas Sirk commonly imitate aspects of the melodramatic form, including its affinity for excess in meaning. Critics and scholars often stage, to quote Peter Brooks's definition, 'a heightened and hyperbolic drama, making reference to pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation'.¹ As Barbara Klinger has shown, Sirk scholarship from the 1970s to the 1990s reflects the main trends in film theory from auteurism and structuralism to the growing influence of feminism, criticism, television studies and cultural studies.² It continues to function as a litmus test for changing views on popular culture and its emancipatory potential. By inviting such overdetermined reactions, Sirk's melodramas have allowed critics to explore the complicated relationship between genre cinema, dominant ideology, and filmic style and to measure the changing currency of terms like 'stylistic excess' and 'subversive strategy' in the constantly shifting field between modernist self-reflexivity and postmodern citation. Oppositional terms (critical vs conventional, subversive vs affirmative, transgressive vs repressive, for example) invariably position his films *vis-à-vis* ideology, whether through strategies of containment or forms of resistance. As I hope to show, Sirk's melodramatic imagination operates in the contested space that opens up between these conflicting attributions and their changing functions in the context of historical and contemporary reception.

1 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. ix.

2 On this point, see Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 1–35. The auteurist rediscovery of Sirk has been mapped critically by William James Horrigan, 'An analysis of the construction of an author: the example of Douglas Sirk' (PhD dissertation: Northwestern University, 1980).

Based on the assumption that there are stylistic continuities in the transition from Sierck to Sirk, we must locate the origins of his directorial style in the cinema of the Third Reich. *Schlussakkord/Final Chord* (1936) offers itself to such an investigation for several reasons. This was Sierck's first melodrama and his first commercial and critical success. As his only German melodrama with a vaguely contemporary setting, it reveals the persistent influence of Weimar cinema but also seems more responsive to the pressures of Nazi ideology than his famous films with Zarah Leander. Eric Rentschler, Marc Silberman and Katie Trumpener have used Sierck's films starring Leander, *Zu neuen Ufern/To New Shores* (1937) and *La Habanera* (1937), to develop more complex views on this quintessential state-controlled cinema and to question some of the assumptions that have informed critical debates on Sirk's US melodramas.³ Continuing in this tradition, it is the purpose of this essay to pursue two strategic goals: to historicize Sirk's use of formal devices and their presumably subversive effects through the particular conditions of Nazi cinema; and to problematize – through close attention to the contractions introduced by and channelled through overdetermined representational strategies – assumptions about ideology, genre, and authorship as coherent and stable systems. There is little to be gained from juxtaposing melodrama as an inherently liberating excess in signification, especially around issues of femininity, with melodrama as part of a masochistic aesthetic which invariably legitimates oppression and discrimination. By paying special attention to the network of cultural references established by key melodramatic elements, I shall explore a third possibility, the use of stylization in the politics of excess and its ideological containment.

The existing controversies are driven by two factors: the double identities of Detlef Sierck and Douglas Sirk, and changing views on melodrama in the context of feminist revisions of the genre. The director's two names evoke the stories of continuity and rupture that have been constructed around his arrival in Hollywood in 1940. In the Anglo-US context, Sirk has been best known for his association with Universal in the 1950s, an association which produced such famous films *All I Desire* (1953), *Magnificent Obsession* (1953), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Written on the Wind* (1955), and *Imitation of Life* (1958). In the German context, the name of Sierck has become synonymous with UFA melodramas like *To New Shores* and *La Habanera*, and has played a crucial role in the transformation of singer-actress Zarah Leander into a cult figure. Sierck's early films are regularly shown on German television, an indication of their enduring popularity and of the pervasive belief in the apolitical nature of entertainment films from the Nazi period.⁴ That the two oeuvres are intricately interrelated has been demonstrated by Rainer Werner Fassbinder – his *Angst essen Seele auf/Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) is actually a remake of *All That Heaven Allows* – whose

³ For a close reading of *La Habanera*, see Katie Trumpener, 'Puerto Rico fever: Douglas Sirk, *La Habanera* (1937) and the epistemology of exoticism', in Sigrid Bauschinger and Susan L. Cocalis (eds.), *'Neue Welt'/Dritte Welt': Interkulturelle Deutungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke Verlag, 1994), pp. 115–39; Bruce Babington, 'Written by the wind: Sierck/Sirk's *La Habanera* (1937)', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1995), pp. 24–36; and the chapter on *La Habanera* in Eric Rentschler's book on Nazi cinema, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 125–45). For a close reading of *To New Shores*, see Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), pp. 51–65.

⁴ For a Sirk biography published in German, see Elisabeth Läuffer, *Skeptiker des Lichts: Douglas Sirk und seine Filme* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987). On his German melodramas, see Jochen Meyer-Wendt, 'Ich brauche etwas mehr Kino': Detlef Siercks deutsche Melodramen', in Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa-Buch* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1992), pp. 382–4.

enthusiasm for the US Sirk has reminded filmmakers of the New German Cinema of the repressed history of German popular cinema from the 1930s. This most ‘German Hollywood director’ has also focused attention on the problems with Sirk by inflecting the latter’s filmic style through his own magnificent obsessions, including the enlistment of the melodramatic mode in much more devious experiments with the tension between mass entertainment and political ideology.

In light of such a complicated structure of rereadings and revisions, a formative work like *Final Chord* seems ideally suited to a symptomatic reading. Unlike Sierck’s collaboration with Leander in *To New Shores* and *La Habanera*, *Final Chord* has remained virtually unknown – perhaps because it features no famous star who would legitimate any performative excesses through the exigencies of the star system, or perhaps because it lacks the aura of exoticism that displaces any destabilizing effects into distant times and places.⁵ Like *La Habanera* and *To New Shores*, *Final Chord* relies on music to achieve its often contradictory effects. But unlike the Leander films and their exercises in self-denial, *Final Chord* follows its Weimar precursors in staging the drama of femininity through the open confrontation of two female stereotypes. As a result, conflicts between motherhood and female eroticism remain external and become subject to critical inspection. Lacking the masochistic atmosphere of the later German melodramas, Sierck’s first contribution to the genre still acknowledges the power of eroticism in its externalization of competing models of femininity, and thus has a good deal in common with its US successors. It occupies a transitional position between the liberating potential of the melodramatic imagination during the Weimar years and its subsequent recruitment to decidedly masochistic scenarios of suffering and self-denial. At the same time, the significance of music in the staging of private emotions and public rituals cannot be understood without reference to the central role of classical music in the making of German national identity. This preoccupation with questions of identity and community must be located in specific German cultural traditions that, during the Third Reich, developed an increasingly aggressive energy and even found expression in Sierck’s views on community in *Final Chord*.

Like Veit Harlan, Helmut Käutner and Wolfgang Liebeneiner, Sierck had come to filmmaking only after 1933 and thus belongs to a group of young directors who, in the absence of strong political convictions, must be described as either political opportunists, ruthless careerists or apolitical aestheticists. As a rising star, Sierck signed a contract with UFA in 1934 and directed seven feature films until he and his Jewish wife, Hilde Jary, left Germany via Rome in 1937. Sierck had turned to film after years as a producer in the Weimar theatre, where his productions reflected new trends in acting and set design but avoided radical experiments. Staging plays in Chemnitz,

⁵ For instance, Caryl Flinn confuses *Final Chord* with *Accord Final*, a French Sierck film from 1939. See ‘Music and the melodramatic past of the New German Cinema’, in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Melodrama* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), p. 108. Michael Stern, in Douglas Sirk (Boston: Twayne, 1979), describes *Final Chord* as the story of a ‘heroine [who] runs off to America to escape her impossible life in Germany’ (p. 34). Perhaps the director himself was affected by the semiotic slippage between the two film titles. His assertion in the Halliday interview that the German title, a musical term, is ambiguous may actually refer to the French film whose title ‘accord final’ means ‘final chord’ as well as ‘concluding agreement’.

Bremen, Leipzig and as a guest producer in Berlin, Sierck made a name for himself through innovative adaptations of the classics (Shakespeare, Kleist, Molire). He rejected the Expressionist legacy but also showed little interest in the initiatives for political theatre spearheaded by Erwin Piscator. Thomas Elsaesser places Sierck's stage productions 'within a recognizably German tradition of philosophical and aesthetic idealism, refined and at the same time tempered by having come into contact with the tough "aristocratic" melancholy in the early, and the strident self-assertion of Germany in the late 'twenties'.⁶ The fact that Sierck also staged Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper/Threepenny Opera* and that his 1933 production of Kaiser's *Der Silbersee/The Silver Lake*, with music by Kurt Weill, caused much political controversy does not necessarily make him a Brechtian filmmaker. Answering attempts by British film critics in the 1970s to discern elements of a Brechtian distanciation effect in Sirk's American films, Gertrud Koch has studied theatre reviews from the 1920s and summarized her findings in the term 'humanistic',⁷ a decidedly un-Brechtian designation.

⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Book review: Sirk on Sirk', *Monogram*, no. 4 (1971), p. 42. A theatre review in the film press places his production of *As You Like It* between Hilpert and Falkenberg: see 'Detlef Siercks Berliner Débit', *Lichtbildbühne*, 9 October 1934.

⁷ Gertrud Koch, 'Von Detlef Sierck zu Douglas Sirk', *Frauen und Film*, nos 44/45 (1988), p. 114.

⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Documents on Sirk', in Jon Halliday et al. (eds), *Douglas Sirk* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972), p. 8. Sierck's talent in working with actors and creating psychological spaces is discussed in an article on his theatre and film career; see Hete Nebel, 'Der Filmregisseur Detlef Sierck', *Lichtbildbühne*, 20 April 1936.

⁹ Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), p. 43.

¹⁰ Sirk, quoted in *ibid*, p. 93.

There is no doubt that his theatre work during the 1920s trained Sierck's eye for the mise-en-scene of emotion, something Elsaesser has called 'psycho-symbolic realism'.⁸ After a brief period of experimentation in other genres, the stage director turned filmmaker came to test its possibilities in the heightened terms of the melodrama. As Sirk would later declare, *Final Chord* was the first manifestation of his auteurist vision. 'From *Schlussakkord* onwards', he told Halliday, 'I tried to develop a cinema style. I began to understand that the camera is the main thing here, because there is *emotion* in the motion pictures. Motion is emotion, in a way it can never be in the theatre'.⁹ These remarks identify a crucial element in his approach to melodrama, the symbolic function of camera movement. Even more relevant to Sirk's approach to the genre is the definition of 'melodramas in the sense of music + drama',¹⁰ which hinges on the centrality of classical music, and musical culture in general, in the formation of public and private identities. The central function of *melos* as a marker of emotionality and a vehicle for stylization links the German to the US films and affects every aspect of the director's melodramatic imagination: the importance of women characters; the emphasis on social and racial differences; the tensions between individual and community; the fascination with decline and degeneration; and the reliance on recurring motifs such as the inevitability of guilt, the ubiquity of suffering, and the impossibility of happiness. In all cases, symbolism, theatricality, and stylization serve to aestheticize the emotional impact of such dramatic configurations and to create distance between the myths of authenticity and the need for heightened representations based on the reality of desire.

The making of *Final Chord* brought together well-known actors and skilled professionals for an ambitious UFA production that tried to

¹¹ Review, *Lichtbildbühne*, 25 July 1936.

¹² Advertisement, *Lichtbildbühne*, 20 August Hans 1936.

appeal to the educated middle class as well as to the traditionally female audiences of the *Frauenfilm*. Shot in a record two months on the UFA lot in Berlin-Babelsberg, *Final Chord* premiered in Dresden on 27 June 1936 on the occasion of the annual convention of cinema owners, and again officially in Berlin on 24 July. Reactions throughout the Reich were very positive. *Lichtbildbühne* praised the film as 'the most honest, most decent and, in its form, most compelling film of recent years'.¹¹ Other reviewers spoke of its artistic dignity and mature restraint and expressed the hope that this 'superb German film'¹² would lure new audiences to the cinema. *Final Chord* was awarded the epithet 'künstlerisch wertvoll' (artistically valuable) and received a prize for best musical film at the Venice Film Festival. Scriptwriter Kurt Heuser, who was later to make a name for himself with biopics like *Rembrandt* (Hans Steinhoff, 1942) and *Paracelsus* (G.W. Pabst, 1943), had relied on well-tried melodramatic formulae to organize the narrative blockages around the central figure of the outsider and to dramatize the underlying system of sexual and social differences. Composer and conductor Kurt Schröder supervised the extensive musical performances, an indication of the film's high production values. The Ninth Symphony was performed by the orchestra of the Berliner Staatsoper; and soloists included the well-known tenor Hellmuth Melchert and Erna Berger, one of the best coloratura sopranos of her generation. More relevant to the stylistic continuities with Weimar cinema, the artistic signature of set designer Erich Kettelhut remains most noticeable in the exterior shots of New York, with its illuminated skyline recalling his famous designs from *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926). Likewise, the cinematography of Robert Baberske relies on the chiaroscuro lighting and unusual camera angles established in classical silent cinema. His dynamic use of foreground and background and the extended travelling shots reveal the influence of Karl Freund, whom Baberske had assisted on *Der letzte Mann/The Last Laugh* (F.W. Murnau, 1924).

These continuities in set design and camerawork show how easily the stylistic traditions of Weimar cinema could be incorporated into a more radicalized fantasy about German culture and identity. The casting of the leading actors benefited from similar connections. Lil Dagover, who received top billing for her portrayal of Charlotte, was cast as a stereotypical character from the decadent 'golden twenties', the egocentric socialite and upper-class wife. Through her work from *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) to *Ich heirate meine Frau/I'm Marrying my Wife* (Johannes Riemann, 1934), Dagover had come to personify the difficult position of the New Woman trying to balance professional and erotic fulfillment with the kind of personal sacrifices required of her within marriage and family life. In contrast to the more subdued interpretation of this conflict by, say, Luise Ullrich in *Versprich mir nichts/Don't Promise Me Anything* (Wolfgang Liebeneiner, 1937),

Dagover's association with an oversaturated upper-class culture legitimated a continuing fascination with such deviation from the norm. In the role of her husband, the famous conductor Erich Garvenberg, Willy Birgel had completed the transition from conventional villains to character parts which eventually earned him the title of *Staatsschauspieler* (state actor), but which also infused his reserved demeanour with an undercurrent of aggression. Maria von Tasnady, who also appeared with Birgel in *Menschen ohne Vaterland* / *People Without Fatherland* (Herbert Maisch, 1937), gave the figure of Hanna the dowdy look and humble attitude necessary for her role as the child's biological, and therefore rightful, mother.

Since the film is not very well known, a brief plot synopsis is perhaps in order. The story opens on a New Year's Eve party in New York. A man is found dead in Central Park and his wife receives the news about his suicide. Because the man had embezzled some money, the couple had fled Germany leaving their young son behind: now Hanna Müller is free to return. Meanwhile, in a Berlin orphanage little Peter is adopted by the conductor and his eccentric wife. Charlotte prefers to spend her days with dubious friends, dabbling in the occult and indulging in an illicit affair with the astrologer Karl-Otto, her dark shadow. Concerned about Peter's wellbeing, her husband hires a nanny – Hanna – who has come to the orphanage to inquire about the whereabouts of her child. She takes the job under the proviso that her identity as the child's real mother never be revealed. This domestic arrangement inevitably creates complications. While Charlotte tries unsuccessfully to sever all links with Karl-Otto, who by now is extorting money from her, Hanna and Garvenberg enjoy many intimate moments in their shared love for the young boy. Charlotte dismisses Hanna after compromising revelations about the latter's past. On the night she returns to the house to abduct her son, the despondent Charlotte takes an overdose of morphine. Hanna is accused of murder but eventually cleared of all charges – and hence freed to form an instant new family with her son and Garvenberg.

How does this rather predictable story engage the melodramatic imagination? Measured against Brooks's definition of melodrama, it does so in almost paradigmatic fashion. The film offers 'indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety'.¹³ Many of these elements revolve around Charlotte Garvenberg, who functions both as a conduit and a blockage in the film's narrative structure. Combining elements of the continental society play and its empty social rituals with the more threatening qualities of the turn-of-the-century femme fatale, this stock character from the erotic imaginary of Weimar cinema attests to melodrama's old-fashioned erotic and aesthetic obsessions – but also betrays its new objectives, beginning with the

¹³ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, pp 11–12.

pathologizing of the sexual woman. Marked from the outset as different, Charlotte comes with her own past history and frequently recalls Freud's case studies on female hysteria. Her nervousness seems to be caused by sexual frustration, and her hysterical outbursts suggest desire without an object. A child, according to her husband, would integrate these free-floating erotic energies and reconnect her desire to the internal and external rewards of motherhood. Without a child, Charlotte seems doomed to remain caught at the narcissistic stage: hence, perhaps, the many mirrors around her. Through her insistence on self-gratification and her unwillingness to serve – as a dutiful wife to her husband, as a mother to the family and, by extension, to the nation – the hysterical woman comes to function as a figure of excess in visual and narrative terms.

Yet her identification with emotionality, theatricality and object symbolism also aligns Charlotte with Sierck's inquiries into stylization and its destabilizing effects. Whereas the character is punished for these transgressions with death by her own hand, Dagover's sheer presence as a beautiful image and a body that articulates the pain of difference eludes such punitive strategies – though only as part of the precarious balance between conformity and resistance that permeates the film. Because her problems lie so close to the surface, Charlotte elicits sympathies not usually extended to the classical villainess. The suggestion of social criticism in the portrayal of upper-class life plays an important role in this elaborate staging of a threatening femininity and decadent culture often described by its detractors as feminized. In the association of woman with leisure and wealth, the film simultaneously celebrates and denounces the trappings of luxury and organizes its own fetishistic investments around the woman as a privileged marker of material and, by implication, sexual excess. Charlotte's double position between cliche and cipher allows Sierck to organize the tensions between convention and aestheticization, catharsis and distanciation, on an aesthetic level. However, any critical insights or visual pleasures to be gained from such a spectacle of ambivalence are predicated on the sure knowledge of the character's eventual expulsion from the scene. To the degree that formal devices like stylization remain a function of conventional narratives, these images cannot escape complicity with the reactionary assumptions about femininity that fuel this process – both in the presentation of multilayered characters like Charlotte and in the development of a distinct melodramatic style.

The implications can be seen in the ways in which Charlotte's otherness make her the perfect embodiment of Weimar decadence and its continuing appeal throughout the Third Reich. Allusions to the *Systemzeit*, to use the National Socialist terminology, can be found in Charlotte's obsession with pleasure, her interest in the occult, her lack of moral values and, most importantly, her gradual physical and psychological deterioration. In her desperate pursuit of happiness,

Charlotte personifies a consumerist lifestyle in which individual actions and attitudes are no longer integrated into a larger whole. Without a community, the yearning for love deteriorates into erotic obsessions and the search for meaning exhausts itself in empty diversions and philosophical fads. Her fate illustrates the inevitable self-destruction of a society ruled by materialism and individualism: here the film reiterates the main arguments of right-wing critics against the Weimar Republic.

However, just as Charlotte's character possesses many dimensions, her association with Weimar culture also provides an imaginary space for the articulation, however compromised, of marginal tastes and preferences. Her personal dilemmas, and presumably those of Weimar society as a whole, are shown to originate in the experience of ambivalence and its cultural and social equivalent – decadence. The conflicts endured by other Sierck heroines (those played by Leander, for example) presuppose the existence of clear boundaries and an inner core, an essence untouched by external change: that is why they require no female antagonist. In the distant times and exotic locales of *To New Shores* and *La Habanera*, decadence must therefore be associated with male aristocrats. Charlotte's conflicts, on the other hand, suggest the dissolution of all certainties into a state of ongoing transformation. Already her first appearance in the film – she is attending an astrological lecture – coincides with a telling comment by Karl-Otto about Gemini, the sign that shows 'the richness, but also the contradictions in those born under this sign'. Her later request to be called by the androgynous name of Charlie further underscores her unwillingness to accept the fixity of sexual roles. There may even be a hint of racial indeterminacy in the oblique references to unforgettable childhood years: her close bond with Freese, a woman with Slavic features and an Eastern European accent, supports such speculations.

If Charlotte personifies the still dangerous attractions of Weimar culture, Garvenberg and Hanna combine the best qualities of the old (pre-Weimar) Germany and the New Reich. Providing the background against which the undoing of Charlotte reaches an almost exemplary quality, they remain stereotypical figures without psychological depth. Garvenberg, who does not even seem to have a first name, lives only through his devotion to classical music. His is a world in which all decisions are unambiguous and where all choices make sense in relationship to a larger whole. Therein Garvenberg represents both the ideal leader and the ideal member of the community. Not surprisingly, the figure of the conductor was used repeatedly in the cinema of the Third Reich to represent the leadership principle, while claiming for more traditional definitions of masculinity the creative and sensitive qualities associated with musicians. Providing a counterweight to the equation of genius and illness in biographical films about Mozart, Schubert, Tchaikovsky and Friedemann Bach, these films about conductors and, to a lesser degree, composers, set out to demonstrate

the compatibility of culture and power. The degree to which such fictions of heroic art hinged on the preservation of traditional gender roles can be seen in *Ich brauche dich/I Need You* (Hans Schweikart, 1944) in which Birgel, again as a conductor, confronts Marianne Hoppe as his independent, strong-willed wife.

Like Garvenberg, Hanna is defined through her strong sense of duty and honour. Allegiance to her husband has forced her to leave Germany without her child and live in American exile. This is why her all-consuming love for Peter also enables her to return to the Garvenberg home and abduct the boy. Hanna's plain appearance and friendly personality make her sexually non-threatening: her interactions with Garvenberg are familial from the beginning. The equation of Hanna with health, which is heightened by the transformative experience of her early illness, makes her a character with inner conflicts, but without ambivalences. Her very being is captured in the statement 'I am here for the child'. Hanna's acceptance of traditional gender roles and her submission to the patriarchal order place her outside the law – because she follows the higher laws of the blood. With these traits, Hanna represents the ideal mother in the context of National Socialist ideology and its fixation on the maternal as a racial, sexual and discursive category. Underscoring the polemical intentions behind formal strategies like duplication and repetition, the first questions about the identity of the child's 'real' mother are raised during a puppet theatre performance of *Snow White* that culminates in a revealing portrayal of the evil stepmother. The degree to which the fairy tale serves as an ongoing commentary on the real-life drama becomes apparent in many other thematic overlays (Charlotte questioning the mirror about her beauty, for instance) and continuities (the transition from the stepmother ordering the poisoning of Snow White to Charlotte firing Hanna).

Despite its sentimental views on motherhood, *Final Chord* has little in common with the idealized mother figures populating official painting and literature of the 1930s. The question of motherhood may be the central dramatic conflict, but the mother herself remains undistinguished, defined less by the complexities of the individual than the universality of the role. It is precisely this normative quality which creates the dramatic void around Hanna as an empty signifier of traditional femininity. Taking an indirect approach to such overdetermined roles, Sierck obviously followed a practice common in the cinema of the Third Reich. Just as the ideal remained at the margins of representation, the Other was seldom denounced openly and directly. Characterization through associations, affinities, and through implicit assumptions about internal consistency and continuity were considered much more effective than any explicit caricatures of social or ethnic groups in aligning the cinematic imagination with specific ideological positions. This explains the frequent use of journalists, intellectuals and effeminate men as stand-ins for 'the Jew'.



Charlotte examining her face in the mirror. All stills from *Final Chord* (Detlef Sierck, 1936).

Subject to similar prohibitions on representation, the ideal of motherhood asserted its significance through the negative foil of the sexual woman who, in turn, proved her depravity through her close association with the world of objects and images. This is the vicious circle of displacements that also extends to Sierck's use of stylization.

Of course, the validation of traditional femininity does not fully account for the degree to which Sierck, in his portrayal of Charlotte, indulges in a fantasy of female eroticism unburdened by the demands of motherhood. The camera's attention focuses on the spectacle of the desiring woman not only in order to record her inevitable destruction, but also to celebrate her in that very ambivalence and indeterminacy. Charlotte occupies the libidinal centre of the film, whether through her association with precious objects that function as sexual symbols, through impulsive gestures that explode the narrow frame, or through exquisite gowns that draw attention to the fetishistic nature of her passions. This double articulation at the level of narrative and visual strategies may be read in two ways. Confirming Frederic Jameson's observation that narrative is a privileged medium for the articulation of conflicts and that ideological positions are always contested, the problem of female eroticism is constituted through the acknowledgment of difference and its eventual containment. While exalting motherhood gives meaning and direction to the narrative, the image of the erotic woman introduces blockages through which narrative continuity is abandoned in favour of pure specularity. This is accomplished, among other things, through closeups from above that capture Charlotte in situations of complete self-abandon and allow the camera to participate in her narcissistic scenarios. With female sexuality thus revealed as performance, eroticism in the cinema becomes linked to, and ultimately disappears into, visual effects that incorporate many formal devices from Weimar art cinema but without their aesthetic provocations. Through such a double-edged approach, Sierck manages at once both to denounce female eroticism and to create an eroticism of the cinema out of the vacillation between transgression and containment that is legitimated through the systematic annihilation of the sexual woman.

In organizing the flow of identifications and offering strategies of distanciation, *Final Chord* takes a remarkably self-conscious approach. However, such strategies are not inherently destabilizing, and must in any case be examined against the horizon of expectation that informed then-contemporary approaches to genre cinema. The shifts between closeness and distance and their different paradigms of spectatorship are an essential part of this distancing effect for they help to control any disruptive energies through the illusion of aesthetic autonomy. In a conventional reading, Hanna – and, to a lesser degree, Peter – offers a convenient figure of identification for those hoping for a cathartic emotional experience. Here Hanna represents normality, including its heavy investment in social conventions and moral standards. The

problems in the Garvenberg household are always presented from her perspective, just as all scenes with the child are structured around the absence and/or presence of the real mother and her loving gaze. Inviting alternative readings, two characters close to Charlotte provide a perspective from which to reflect critically on events and to problematize underlying assumptions. They do so by drawing attention to the performative aspects of identity – both Maria Koppenhöfer and Albert Lippert preferred a theatrical acting style – and by mirroring the behaviour of their masters in the tradition of classical drama. A transition from Karl-Otto's masks and fetishes to a bas-relief of Beethoven establishes surprising similarities in the men's equally selfish and condescending treatment of Charlotte. Garvenberg serves the gods of classical music, while Karl-Otto operates under the signs of the zodiac. On several occasions, Charlotte's lover speaks about musical correspondences and the importance of 'music as a function of subterranean forces'. He might as well be describing Garvenberg, whose romantic interest in Hanna is kindled by their shared musical tastes and for whom music provides the emotional comforts lacking in his personal life. While Karl-Otto functions as a caricature of Garvenberg and his almost religious exaltation of music, Freese's superstitions offer a distorted representation of Charlotte's desperate quest for eternal love and beauty. Significantly, the resolution of the dramatic conflict in the final trial scene comes through Karl-Otto's and Freese's conflicting statements about Charlotte's death: another indication that their theatricality must remain subordinate to the main goal, the constitution of the nuclear family.

The identification of Hanna and Peter with emotional catharsis and of Freese and Karl-Otto with critical detachment seems to support what many Sirk critics have described as a two-levelled approach in the staging of stylistic and emotional excess. The so-called Sirkian system thus becomes identified with a double text of latent and manifest meanings, theatrical and cinematic elements, formal convention and artistic innovation, social conformity and semiotic instability. This configuration is often presumed to generate transgressive effects irrespective of the historical conditions of reception. Arguing in this vein, Paul Willemen has maintained that distance in the melodrama is an effect produced not through audiences – who are too deeply implicated – but through the relationship between producer and product. Sirk, he insists, always inscribes his own distance from the spectacle into the filmic structures and invariably operates on two levels, for instance by superimposing theatrical concepts onto the cinematic mode of representation. Through the 'contradiction between distanciation and implication, between fascination and its critique', Willemen concludes, the director was able 'to thematise a great many contradictions inherent in the society in which he worked and the world he depicted'.¹⁴ Rather than problematizing the concept of 'inner emigration' that informs such



Karl Otto during a lecture on the occult.

¹⁴ Paul Willemen, 'Towards an analysis of the Sirkian system', in Lucy Fischer (ed.), *Douglas Sirk: Imitation of Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 274.

remarks, I would want to shift the focus from authorial intentions to different modes of address. Accordingly, the textual strategies could also be read as a way of satisfying the expectations of two distinct audiences, the regular consumers of melodramas and the members of the educated middle class. From such a perspective, the resultant contradictions and ironies can hardly be described as inherently critical, subversive or counterhegemonic: they are always several things at once, and they must always be read in relation to the pressures exerted by a particular historical conjuncture.

A closer look at the symbolic function of props and settings in such a tradition of art cinema may help to explain the affirmative function of distanciation in the rituals of bourgeois art appreciation. The close attention to space and spatiality indebts *Final Chord* to a specific German tradition in cinema and the other arts. Sierck's approach to mise-en-scène follows the model established by the *Kammerspielfilm* of the early 1920s. In treating the tightly constructed interiors as reflections of the characters' inner worlds, the *Kammerspielfilm* and its successors tried to develop alternatives to the US cinema of narrative continuity, and thereby attract middle-class audiences whose tastes remained influenced by bourgeois theatre. The influence of the *Kammerspielfilm* on Sierck, the former theatre producer, can be seen in a heavy reliance on theatrical devices such as foreground and background; in formal experiments with framing, for instance in the extensive travelling shots; and in a general propensity for spatial over temporal relations in the development of narrative continuity. However, in mapping the theatrical influence on Sierck's melodramas, these formal devices should not be celebrated as a means of distanciation without taking into account the degree to which Weimar cinema had already appropriated new forms of staging, lighting and mass choreography for its own purposes.

References to the visual arts are evident in the rather conventional object symbolism that extends from flowers as sexual symbols to masks and mirrors as active participants in the staging of identity crises. Such practices betray the influence of art historian Erwin Panofsky, with whom Sierck had studied in Hamburg. Panofsky's observation that film stands in the iconographic tradition of the mediaeval arts found deep resonances in the work of his student. Sierck's highly codified approach to images and their culturally determined meanings finds expression in the comparison between Hanna and Charlotte via two art objects, a Madonna with Child and a sylph-like glass figurine. The juxtaposition of high and low culture becomes even more problematic through its encoding in national terms through the transition from a precious Baroque sculpture to a kitschy miniature model of the Statue of Liberty. These examples demonstrate the contempt for the consuming passions of the melodrama that, after all, make possible the presentation of dramatic conflicts in aesthetic rather than conceptual terms. *Final Chord* infuses high-culture

elements in a decidedly popular genre and accommodates forms of reading that are conventional precisely in their most self-referential moments. In a culture with a long tradition of suspicion towards the visual, stylization – the investment of the image with iconographic and metaphorical significance – provided a convenient method of anchoring the image in specific semiotic fields and interpretive patterns. The allusions to painting, theatre and music not only reconciled cinema with the demands of high culture, but also provided a kind of screen through which social conflicts, as well as residual resentments, could be dissolved into aesthetic experiences and their illusions of dissent. Describing these strategies as subversive without taking into account their function within dominant practices means reading any departure from the dominant realist text as inherently critical and counterhegemonic. That Sirk's melodramas of the 1950s may have such an effect in the context of 1990s nostalgia for the classical Hollywood studio system is an entirely different question.

The need for historical contextualization is nowhere more evident than in relation to music, the unifying force behind Sirk's own conception of melodrama. Diegetic music punctuates the narrative in the form of live performances, radio broadcasts and gramophone recordings, and makes the act of listening a vehicle for epiphanies as well as transfigurations. Themes from these musical pieces are taken up by the film's musical score at significant points in the narrative. There is a clear distinction between the presumably destructive quality of modern music (the jazz band in the New York episode, the swing music at Charlotte's party) and the ability of classical music to provide emotional sustenance and forge communities across spatial and social boundaries. Sierck's choice of musical pieces betrays an extensive knowledge of the classical canon and its significance within German culture. For instance, after a confrontation with Charlotte, Hanna goes to the opera to attend a performance of an early twentieth-century opera, possibly by Alexander von Zelinsky. The contralto aria 'Drop of hemlock, sweet and deadly' gives voice to Hanna's fear of being eliminated by a powerful rival, just as the stage scene with an older woman poisoning a younger expresses her displaced desire to kill the 'false' mother. Similarly, the performance of the Handel oratorio 'Judas Maccabeus' in the closing scene installs Hanna and Peter in their rightful place as mother and child. While the lyrics call for a celebration of the returning hero and the community that supports him, the camera moves from Hanna and Peter, presented like the Madonna with Child, to jubilant Baroque angels with trumpets.¹⁵ Just as the object symbolism reveals some familiarity with art historical conventions, Sierck's reliance on music in commenting on dramatic configurations shows the degree to which the director consciously addressed himself to elite tastes. Interestingly, no qualitative distinction is made between live performances and radio broadcasts, a comment perhaps on the important role of radio, the

¹⁵ The lyrics in the English version are 'See the conquering hero comes! Sound the trumpets, beat the drums; sports prepare, the laurel bring, songs of triumph to him sing'.



Charlotte's empty seat at the concert



Hanna in New York, dreaming of her child

so-called *Volksempfänger* (people's receiver), in creating an imaginary community of listeners.

Consider this sequence: A concert performance in Berlin of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the final movement – Schiller's 'Ode to Joy'. Dissolve to mighty ocean waves. Broadcast worldwide, the music reaches a despondent young woman in New York City. Moved by the music, she rises from her sickbed and vows to return home to her child. From the photograph of a boy on the bedside table, via the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, the scene returns to the concert hall and the puzzling image of an empty seat in the front row. Dissolve to a bedroom. An exquisitely dressed woman expresses frustration to her maid about having to attend the concert, but eventually changes her mind. Arriving late, she is barred from entering and leaves in a huff. The significance of the sequence is captured in the declaration by Hanna, the ailing woman in New York, at the end of the radio broadcast that 'I must go home to my child'. Home, of course, means the reunification of mother and child: it also means the need for a stable identity and the importance of community. As in all later musical performances, such yearnings are expressed through specific dramatic situations and their underlying auditory configurations. These include the separation between mother and child and the power of music in restoring their bond; the juxtaposition of two stereotypical female characters and the projection of their differences on the auditory mise-en-scene; and the evocation of an ideal community and its reliance on the musical encoding of difference. As such an overdetermined marker of identity, music not only initiates the major transitions but also brings out the underlying regimes of inclusion and exclusion.

The subsequent shift to the live performance of the 'Ode to Joy' seems unusually long for a feature film and forces us to consider its disruptive effect on the narrative from the standpoint of its rich musical and cultural connotations. As is well known, Beethoven has always been a key figure in the construction of German national identity.¹⁶ His reception during the Nazi period, however, added to the cult of heroic genius a new obsession with national origins; a similar re-evaluation of community informed new approaches to Schiller as the quintessential German dramatist. With these additional meanings, the performance marks a paradigmatic moment in the film's definition of community. The sequence suggests that the experience of closeness and the forging of a common bond is only accomplished through the figure of the outsider. Accordingly, the empty seat in the concert hall does not just mark Charlotte's absence: it functions above all as a place holder for anyone excluded from the community because of certain behaviours or attributes. Guarding the sanctity of the performance, the ushers refuse to admit Charlotte when she tries to gain admission during the first movement. Their actions are validated by reaction shots from members of the audience, including a

16 On the use of Beethoven's music in other films of the Third Reich, see Hans Rutz, 'Beethoven und der Film', *Film-Kurier*, 28 May 1938. In *Dreiklang* (Triad, 1938), one of the examples cited by the author, Kurt Schröder repeated his formula from *Final Chord* and incorporated well-known classical motifs into the film score, the film is allegedly based on an idea by Sierck.

stern-looking woman seated in the aisle near the door. The next transition, on the auditory level, from the celebration of universal brotherhood in the Schiller text to Charlotte's angry cry 'Just stop it!' (addressed to her maid and, indirectly, to her husband) only serves to 'prove' her complete lack of understanding of classical music and the values it represents. Consequently, when the lyrics continue with the lines 'Those who hold a heart in keeping/One – in all the world – his own/Who has failed, let him with weeping/From our fellowship begone!', the fates of Charlotte and Hanna are decided. Hanna will re-enter the community because of her love for the child, whereas Charlotte will be expelled and punished for her deviation from the norm. In defining the community and its members through shot/shot-reverse patterns and through increasing long shots that extend from the conductor, the soloists, the orchestra and the chorus to all the performers and the entire audience, this sequence even makes the historical audience in the cinema active participants in the forging of a new group identity. In the end, all listeners and spectators are recognized as important members of a new spiritual community – apart from the one evoked through the empty seat in the first row.

A dense *leitmotif* structure dissolves the distinctions between diegetic and non-diegetic music and further strengthens the all-encompassing power of *melos*. After their first appearance in the credit sequence, variations from Tchaikovsky's 'Nutcracker Suite' return repeatedly in the film's musical score. As part of the crosscutting between Berlin and New York that is organized around Hanna's emotional reaction to the Ninth Symphony, *leitmotifs* from the 'Dance of the Toy Flutes' are introduced to facilitate the equally emotional transition to her son. On the word 'child', spoken by Hanna during her interview with the police, and a closeup of the boy's photograph, the scene shifts from the facades of cheap tenements and an illuminated New York skyline via the Atlantic Ocean to aerial shots of Berlin's historical centre, and finally reaches closure on the face of little Peter in an orphanage. Mirroring the cultural differences associated with the USA and Germany, the musical score changes from dramatic to lyrical and pastoral tones. These references continue in an actual performance of the 'Nutcracker Suite' attended by Hanna and the director of the orphanage. Here the 'Chinese Dance', in which an exotic prince saves a young woman from a wild demon, seems to warn Hanna of some of the difficulties awaiting her, whereas the crosscutting from the cheerful folk dancers from the 'Russian Dance' to the adulterous Charlotte and her lover only underscores their moral depravity.¹⁷ Motifs from the Tchaikovsky score return again when Hanna administers the right (or wrong?) dose of medicine and when she has a nightmare about this fateful last encounter with Charlotte.

Responding to the Anglo-US reception of Sirk, Gertrud Koch has emphasized the sadistic impulses behind such patterns of inclusion and exclusion. She speaks of 'a privileging of racial or ideological

¹⁷ The scene was shot in Berlin's Theater des Westens: see 'Willy Birgel dirigiert Tschakowsky', *Lichtbildbühne*, 10 March 1936.

¹⁸ Koch, 'Von Detlef Sierck zu Douglas Sirk', pp. 118–19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

communities over conventional societies, of the internally “illuminated” over the superficially hedonistic, of renunciation over fulfilment, of recuperation over degeneration.¹⁸ This deep structure, Koch argues, makes the Sirkian melodrama compatible equally with National Socialism and with Eisenhower America. Locating the origins of the famed Sirk style in an authoritarian, sadistic gaze, Koch finds a problematic ‘pattern [that] extends from the Nazi films to the American melodramas’.¹⁹ This pattern, she insists, is established through the inscription of the viewing subject into narrative constellations that privilege relations of domination and subordination. In her view, stylistic excess in Sirk remains predicated on the formation of subject positions that only implicate the spectator more deeply in the convergence of pleasure and pain. Such problematic configurations have little in common with the experiences of distanciation celebrated in auteurist and formalist interpretations of the melodramas of the 1950s. In light of the clear breaks in Sirk’s biography, I would not speak only of continuities, as Koch does, but also of patterns of cultural transfer and transformation. Like Lubitsch, Murnau and Lang before him, Sierck brought to the Hollywood cinema a highly developed cinematic style. The confrontation with US society and the Hollywood studio system made possible a creative reassessment of these traditions and resulted in a reorganization of their constituent elements. Even where he continued to indulge his fantasies of decadence and decline, these topics assumed a new, and at times critical, dimension in a 1950s USA consumed by its obsession with normality, conformism and wholesomeness. Of course, these changing configurations still leave open questions about the location of such subversive effects in formal strategies or modes of reception and, even more importantly, about the relevance of such transgressive or subversive effects for the definition of cinema as a functional public sphere and a potentially progressive mass medium.

Unfortunately, most of the scholarship on Sirk’s famous melodramas of the 1950s has paid little attention to his productive years during the Third Reich. In the context of Anglo-US debates, the reasons for such neglect are all too clear. Acknowledging the formative influence of the cinema of the Third Reich would implicate Sirk’s visual and narrative strategies in its complicated negotiation of power and pleasure, whether in the form of continuities or radical breaks. Hence some critics have simply rewritten history to protect the *oeuvre* from contamination. Stern speaks of Sirk’s contribution to ‘German cinema on the verge of Nazification’²⁰ – all of his films were made after 1933! – and locates the high points of his career in Weimar Germany and Eisenhower America. Where the director’s activities during the Third Reich are mentioned, the work tends to be associated with various forms of aesthetic resistance. According to his hagiographer Halliday, Sirk in the 1930s maintained a position of creative autonomy against institutional pressures and infused

²⁰ Stern, *Douglas Sirk*, p. 23.

conventional or ideologically charged material with alternative meanings. *Final Chord*, Halliday claims, forced Sirk to ‘accept an atrociously mawkish story, loaded down with “melodrama”, and turn it into something new’. In the director’s own words, the UFA may have been ultra-conservative, but its economic objectives also protected filmmakers against direct interference: ‘It was still a privately owned company, and there weren’t any Nazis in it at the time – they didn’t have to be, because the Hugenberg people were very right-wing anyway. In 1934–35 the situation in the movies was still a lot better than in the theatre.’²¹ Sirk may have been right in emphasizing the differences between a popular mass medium like cinema and a heavily subsidized repertory theatre, the driving force behind German nationalism since the Enlightenment and an important testing ground for Nazi cultural politics before 1933. But instead of elaborating on the precarious institutional position of cinema between propaganda and entertainment, Halliday simply translates these conditions into aesthetic practices and interprets them as signs of artistic freedom. Hence his conclusion: ‘It is striking then within the overall highly oppressive political context of Germany that there was considerable freedom of manoeuvre on such matters as rewriting the script, lighting, camerawork, and casting’.²²

²¹ Sirk, quoted in Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, p. 35. For portraits of the director in the German trade press of the time, see Detlef Sierck, ‘Das lockende Bild’, *Lichtbildbühne*, 20 May 1935 (interview) and S. Pfankuch, ‘Detlef Sierck und seine Kunst’, *Filmwache*, no. 34 (1936).

²² Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, p. 9.

²³ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁴ Halliday, ‘Notes on Sirk’s German films’, pp. 20–21.

²⁵ Julian Petley, ‘Detlef Sierck’, *Cinegraph: Lexikon zum deutschsprachigen Film*, Lg. 8, E 6–9. See also his ‘Sirk in Germany’, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 57, no. 1 (1987/88), pp. 58–61.

Avoiding comparisons with other filmmakers of the time, Halliday locates Sirk’s pessimistic outlook in Weimar Germany’s atmosphere of ‘failed political revolution and a highly ambiguous cultural explosion’,²³ and aligns the director’s stylistic excesses with ‘the traditions of Weill, Ophuls, Brecht, and Sternheim’.²⁴ Whether or not such affinities with Brecht or Ophuls exist, the frequently made claims about stylistic affinities serve a dual function. They establish a pattern of influence in which any statements about the ironic, self-reflexive nature of Sirk’s melodramas can be separated from more compromised configurations. Celebrating Sierck as a leftist theatre producer from the 1920s draws attention away from his film projects after 1933. Even someone as familiar with the cinema of the Third Reich as Julian Petley characterizes Sierck’s ironic detachment as an effective method of subverting manifest ideological contents.²⁵ In a kind of circular argument, any emphasis on his distinct visual style is legitimated through, and thus offers proof of, the assertion that formal excess is inherently destabilizing – as if theatricality and stylization were not also an integral part of Nazi aesthetics. For instance, the symbolic investment of mise-en-scène is perhaps most pronounced in the formal and emotional excesses of Veit Harlan, whose contribution to the melodramatic imagination in the Third Reich throws into relief some of the issues at stake in a critical reassessment of Sierck. As recent studies by Rentscher and others have shown, many successful German films from the 1930s and early 1940s thrived on this kind of controlled transgression and, within the larger cultural formation overseen by the Propaganda Ministry, offered precisely the

combination of conventional narratives, overdetermined characters, performative excess, technical wizardry and visual spectacle necessary for the preservation of the status quo. Whereas other genres like the revue film and the musical comedy also helped articulate contradictions within official ideology, especially around issues of gender, there is no doubt that melodrama, with its complicated structures of identification and heightened sense of reality, was particularly suited for the displacement of the resultant tensions into unstable perceptual relations and representational strategies.

Any discussion of these larger issues must conclude with some consideration, however preliminary, of the continuities and ruptures in the social and cultural currency of so overdetermined a genre as melodrama. Contrary to widespread assumptions, the cinema of the Third Reich produced surprisingly few melodramas in the years preceding World War II. While a decline in numbers would not necessarily be an indication of lesser relevance, it does raise questions about the degree to which elements from the emancipatory mass culture of the Weimar years survived during the 1930s. According to Heide Schlüpmann and Patrice Petro, melodrama played a crucial role in the emergence of female audiences in Wilhelmine and Weimar cinemas and provided an important place for the articulation of particular concerns and desires.²⁶ Given the extreme sexism and misogyny of Nazi ideology, it is hardly surprising that such possibilities were systematically eliminated after 1933 and replaced by more cheerful, or more sentimental, celebrations of an essentialized gender difference. Dramatic conflict remained the prerogative of men, as evidenced by Prussian films, genius films, and the big-budget *Staatsauftragsfilme* (state-commissioned films). Entertainment in the tradition of Hollywood cinema continued to be provided by countless romantic comedies, musical comedies and sophisticated comedies. Thus marginalized, melodrama was able to incorporate a variety of perspectives, whether in the form of spectatorial pleasures or filmic styles, and accommodated the artistic ambitions of directors like Sierck, Käutner, and Harlan. However, this affinity for the melodramatic had less to do with these directors' commitment to a traditionally female genre than with their desire to find residues of aesthetic consciousness in a cinema not exactly known for innovative visual styles. It was only during the war and postwar years that melodrama gained in popularity as a privileged medium for renegotiating gender relations and coming to terms with loss and disillusion: only at this point did women emerge as major dramatic characters. Significantly, the most famous melodrama from these years, *Romanze in Moll/Romance in a Minor Key* (Helmut Käutner, 1942), stages the drama of woman's desire in a minor key, with the musical term pointing to both the film's pervasive atmosphere of melancholia and the marginal position of such counterproductive pleasures.

²⁶ See Heide Schlüpmann, *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks: Das Drama des frühen deutschen Kinos* (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 1990); Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²⁷ On melodrama and the problem of femininity, see Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987); in particular Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury, observations on the family melodrama' (pp. 43–69) and Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and melodrama' (pp. 75–81). See also E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: the Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Marcia Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film and Television Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992).

As a rule, the melodrama of the Third Reich presented its stories of female sacrifice through women characters caught between duty and desire, freedom and submission.²⁷ While deeply invested in the staging of ambivalences, it derived its stabilizing effect from a process of aestheticization that denied the social origins of such conflicts and advocated acceptance of the 'natural' order of things. The results can be seen in films with such titles as *Eine Frau, die weiss, was sie will/A Woman who Knows what She Wants* (Viktor Janson, 1934); *Frauenliebe – Frauenleid/Woman's Love – Woman's Suffering* (Augusto Genina, 1937); *Eine Mutter kämpft um ihr Kind/A Mother Fights for her Child* (Heinz Helbig, 1938); *Die Kellnerin Anna/The Waitress Anna* (Artur Brauner, 1941); and *Damals/Then* (Max Hansen, 1943), the latter an attempt to capitalize on Leander's successes with Sierck. In most of these films, the actions of a single career woman or a frustrated wife in a childless marriage threaten patriarchal power structures and make necessary a reaffirmation of traditional family values and fixed gender roles. Whether dealing with a younger rival, an inattentive husband or a rebellious child, the central woman character either accepts her biological calling or is punished for her insistence on self-realization: the consequences are played out to the end in *Streit um den Knaben Jo/Fighting over the Boy Jo* (Erich Waschneck, 1937) and *Roman eines Arztes/A Doctor's Story* (Jürgen von Alten, 1939). Because of the complete identification of the feminine with the maternal, the position of moral superiority in the melodrama did not remain limited to biological mothers but – in sharp distinction to *Final Chord* – extended to all areas of public life: to the community as the family, that is, and to the woman as mother to the nation. Thus in the fictional world of cinema, the necessary transition from 'pure girl' and 'good comrade' to mature womanhood found sympathetic representation even in the figure of the good (and often much younger) stepmother: her efforts were portrayed twice in adaptations of the Storm novella *Viola tricolor*, once in *Serenade* (Willi Forst, 1937) with Sierck's own son Klaus Detlef as the child, and, after the war, in another collaboration between Harlan and Söderbaum, *Ich werde dich auf Händen tragen/I Will Cherish You* (Kurt Hoffmann, 1958).

In summary, the constituent elements of the later Sirkian style, including strategies of stylization and distanciation, are to be found in the German as well as in the US melodramas. However, to speak of continuities from an auteurist perspective or to conceive of a stable signifying system in structuralist terms would mean to neglect the productive force of reception – from the social, cultural and economic forces that drive the actual process of filmmaking through to a film's complex afterlife in fandom and scholarship. Sirk's work must be historicized if its complexities are to be fully appreciated. As I have shown, his German melodramas derive their stabilizing qualities precisely from the instabilities introduced by the tension between

normative positions on sexual difference and indulgence in representational excess. Perhaps melodrama, more than other genres, depends on historical conditions of spectatorship, especially in relation to categories of gender and class. Perhaps it is constituted as a popular genre only through culturally specific forms of reception that include the vacillation between high and low culture and the interpretative acts of changing audiences. Historical contextualization allows us to read stylization as an aestheticized perspective that offers either an illusion of aesthetic freedom or, in the form of retrospective readings, a version of ideological overdetermination. Only an awareness of the forces that shape the melodramatic imagination at specific times and places will shed light on this elusive dynamic.

I would like to thank Marcia Klotz and Katie Trumpener for their helpful suggestions.

Policing the cinema: *Traffic in Souls* at Ellis Island, 1913

LEE GRIEVESON

1 *Traffic in Souls* was produced in 1913 by the Independent Motion Picture Company (IMP) and distributed by Universal Film Company, written and produced by Walter MacNamara and directed by George Loane Tucker



Traffic in Souls (George Loane Tucker, 1913)
Picture courtesy: BFI Stills

There is a scene near the beginning of the 1913 feature film *Traffic in Souls* shot around Ellis Island, the immigrant station that functioned as the 'gateway to America'.¹ Two Swedish women are approached on board an immigrant ship by a 'white slaver' who offers them legitimate work. They accept, he signals a colleague – played by Walter MacNamara, writer and producer of the film – who in turn alerts headquarters with a cable passed on to the ship's wireless operator, played by George Loane Tucker, the film's director. After they disembark from the ferry 'Ellis Island', which was used to transport immigrants from the island to the Battery on Lower Manhattan, the women are met by their brother; but waiting members of the 'vice traffic' provoke him into a fight and he is arrested by a passing policeman. The white slaver escorts the sisters to a brothel purporting to be a Swedish Employment Agency.

The action at the Battery takes place whilst actual immigrants were coming ashore. Some of them look directly at the camera; one person waves, another takes his hat off, some children smile, as these images come to resemble earlier actuality films such as *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* (Edison, 1903) and *Arrival of Emigrants, Ellis Island* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1906). In *Traffic in Souls* this lengthy scene of disembarkation exceeds any narratively functional significance, allowing moments of contemplation divorced from the narrative progression that will gather pace from the moment the sisters emerge. When they do – wearing pigtails and 'traditional' Swedish costume – they mingle with those same crowds in front of a sign

reading 'US Immigration Service'. The real-life immigrants stand next to the fictionalization of immigration: the real and the fictional stand momentarily side by side. The imbrication of the document – at the level of the profilmic – with the fiction in these images provides an almost literal enactment of the more general enmeshing of fact and fiction in early cinema, characterized by David Levy as a 'two-way traffic across a weak ontological frontier'.² The blurring of this frontier is present, here at a different kind of frontier, in the space of these images. The direct look at the camera from the margins of the frame draws the attention, foregrounding the fact of filmic enunciation, itself strangely overdetermined by the presence of MacNamara and Tucker moments before, and suggesting the question: that woman, wearing a bonnet, a white blouse, carrying a bag and looking at the camera and then away – is she a part of this fiction? Is she a character? And further: is she inside or outside?

The troublesome nature of the nonfictional was not limited to this curious manifestation of an 'acentricity' more commonly associated with the preclassical, nor with a direct address associated with documentary,³ but was actually present on the level of the profilmic. An account of the filming of this scene is recorded in *Motion Picture Story Magazine*:

Suddenly, in full view of the crowd, a roughly clad man walked up and deliberately pushed the young immigrant, then struck him a violent blow Cries of indignation arose from the crowd, the old game was so obvious. The two men who interfered with the immigrants were about to be roughly handled by the crowd, when someone on its outer fringe cried: 'Let 'em alone, it's all right!'. A roar of laughter arose. Even above the noise a peculiar rattling buzz could be heard. Then came another voice: 'Let 'em alone; it's the movies!'.⁴

The crowd behave for a moment like the spectator burlesqued in *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Edison, 1902), too caught up in the story, almost stepping across the frontier of the fictive as Josh does in tearing down the screen of representation. A reassertion of the distinct space of the fictive occurs here only through the 'peculiar rattling buzz' of the somewhat less than silent movies, a feature of those movies seemingly just about recognizable by 1913. All the same, Tucker reshaped the fight scene on a deserted waterfront,⁵ shifting away from the unpredictability of the profilmic and so restoring an emphatic fictionality to the text. Such a movement within the text works to defuse the disruptive potential of the 'document' – here, the immigrants milling around Ellis Island – which had been introduced seemingly to authenticate the narrative, with the immigrants helping to create (in Barthes's sense) a 'reality effect', part of that process whereby 'The silent common people . . . are constantly summoned to signify the real world'.⁶ The attempt to integrate the document into the

² David Levy, 'Reconstituted newsreels, re-enactments and the American narrative film', in Roger Holman (ed.), *Cinema 1900/1906: an Analytical Study* (Brussels: FIAF, 1982), p. 249.

³ See Peter Kramer and Ine Van Doren 'The politics of direct address', in Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp (eds), *Film and the First World War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995) for an incisive reading of the relation of documentary to an earlier cinema of attractions.

⁴ *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, December 1914, p. 89, quoted in Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), pp. 78–9.

⁵ See the account in *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'The totalizing quest of meaning', in Michael Renov (ed.), *Theorizing Documentary* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 97. See also Roland Barthes, 'The realistic effect', trans. Gerald Mead, *Film Reader* 3 (1978), pp. 131–5.

fiction is here then peculiarly visible, not reaching that transparent unity that is central to the classical cinema's economy in which the fictive and the real are seamlessly elided.

The enmeshing of a direct address to and a fictional disavowal of the audience, the plurality of origins in mise-en-scene, and the 'reality-status' of the profilmic all point to a split within *Traffic in Souls* between different configurations of textuality. This in turn may be linked to a split in textual aim. On the one hand the film aims to document awareness of the problem of white slavery, of the abduction of (white) women into prostitution, whilst on the other there is clearly an attempt to link this with the production of an entertaining, thrilling fiction. The text may be positioned then in the interstices of a division between a fictional cinema and a cinema of fact, a division that is not ontological but resolutely historical and which, I will argue here, is central to the delimitation and construction of a realm of classical cinema. Concentrating on the moment preceding the development of a multireel fictional classicism, what follows will take *Traffic in Souls* as a site around which this policing of the cinema can be pursued in some detail. In particular, the split initially visible in those images from Ellis Island can be tracked through the textual configuration of *Traffic in Souls*, through a genealogy of the text in relation to its links to a social reform imperative, and through debates which proliferated around this text (and others) in relation to the social functioning of cinema. Through the detailed analysis of this text sited on the border of classicism, my analysis aims to participate in a wider genealogy of that classicism by interrogating 'the details and accidents that accompany every beginning' and uncovering that which conditions, limits and institutionalizes discourse.⁷

7 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 80.

8 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 2.

Hayden White's suggestion that discourse is inevitably contaminated by tropes or rhetorical figures, which means that 'all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively',⁸ has effectively questioned the ontological distinction between fact and fiction. In film studies, the seemingly ineluctable dualisms between the realist tendencies of the cinema and its formalist potential have been deconstructed, with the result that the nonfictional and the fictional have been seen as fundamentally intertwined, with the line of erasure between the two constantly opening and closing. From the perspective of this theoretical work, the elevation of a contingent division between configurations of textuality and discourse to the status of the ontological may be traced out historically. Such a division became particularly acute at the unstable moment on the border of the development and institutionalization of a multireel fictional classicism, where the definition, construction and delimitation of the cinema became particularly charged issues. An intensive policing of the cinema at this moment will ultimately clear a space within which the classical cinema will operate, at the same time marginalizing a realm

⁹ Christian Metz, 'Some points in the semiotics of the cinema', in *Film Language: a Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 94.

we may (for the moment inadequately) term 'documentary' to, in Christian Metz's words, 'the marginal provinces, border regions . . . [of] the feature length film of novelistic fiction'.⁹ A gradual discursive construction of mainstream cinema as a fictional aesthetic medium distinct from a realm we may term the political is a crucial moment in a wider genealogy of that classical cinema.

This policing of the marginal provinces of cinema is not simply repressive but also productive. The marginalization of certain textual practices and industrial strategies produces a coalescence of those elements into a definable realm of cinema. That is, a realm we know as 'documentary' can emerge only after a complex textual and discursive production *and* marginalization. I shall suggest that the relegation of a realm of 'documentary' to the border regions of classicism is predicated on a discursive separation of a realm of the aesthetic from a realm of the political. A progressive differentiation of classical fictional cinema from politics and from other discourses encloses that cinema 'within a radical intransivity', detaching it and opposing it to other forms of discourse.¹⁰ This process whereby 'the movies' could be 'left alone' – as the voice from the crowd suggested – was to become central in the definition of classical cinema. This battle clears out a space within which the classical cinema came to operate, producing that cinema as a fictional space distinct from 'contamination' by the real and the political.

The historical delimitation of aesthetic discourse from power has considerable ideological ramifications. Following on from the scene on Ellis Island I want to analyse in detail this delimitation's link with the marginalization of the representation of ethnicity. Again, this has a specificity in relation to *Traffic in Souls*, but I want also to suggest one or two wider instances of this process, both in relation to the nativist rhetoric which accompanied the 'white slavery' scare and in relation to an inscription of US cinema within the discourses of imperialism and nationalism. This inscription would become part of a broader discursive attempt to bypass ethnically diverse audiences through the construction of a unified subject of mass-cultural consumption associated with the institutionalization of classicism.

Ben Brewster's analysis of *Traffic in Souls* in the context of the complex history underpinning the institutional and technical development of the multireeler places the text on the border of a multireel classicism that would become hegemonic in the later 1910s. The film is one of the first to utilise the resources of alternation developed in Griffith's Biograph shorts to develop a feature-length narrative highly anticipatory of postwar classicism. As such, it sets out plot information early, motivates coincidences, develops multiple plotlines and moves between them for the purposes of suspense and plot progression. Besides which, as the Universal promotional leaflet states: 'Punishment is meted out to each and every individual who

¹¹ *Traffic in Souls*, Universal Studios Pamphlet, in Box 107 of the Controversial Film Files, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library (hereafter NBR).

¹² Ben Brewster, 'Traffic in Souls: an experiment in feature-length narrative construction', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1991), p. 43 (emphasis mine).

¹³ This epilogue is not present in the extant US print but is in the version at the National Film Archive in London. It does also exist in a script outline written by Walter MacNamara which is available in Box 107, NBR.

¹⁴ André Gaudreault, 'Singular narrative, iterative narrative: *Au Bagne* (Pathé, 1905)', *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9 (1991), pp. 66–74.

does wrong in the story'.¹¹ In retracing the feature film from European models to US productions of literary classics, Brewster argues that in many cases both the European and US productions were shot as single-reel films made up of separate episodes but often released as a continuous programme. *Traffic in Souls* differs in that its narrative breaks do not coincide with its reel breaks. Brewster locates three significant narrative breaks linked with shifts in textual emphasis. The prologue functions like a separate two-reeler, introducing the two families who come to dominate the fiction before shifting emphasis onto what Brewster terms a *quasi-documentary* presentation of the white slavers' methods (the scene at Ellis Island and also a scene of an abduction of a rural migrant from Penn Station). This section is distinct from the *less documentary*-oriented main narrative, where we follow the abduction of the 'little sister' (Lorna) of the first family introduced and the efforts of that family to rescue her.¹² The rescue is ultimately successful due to the combined efforts of the older sister, her policeman boyfriend, and their invalid father's invention of a device which can record conversations carried out via a dictaphone. The father in the second family, Trubus, is responsible for the white slave network and is brought to justice. In the epilogue his wife dies, his daughter disowns him and he commits suicide.¹³

The distinction Brewster draws between levels of documentary is hesitant precisely because the terms of that distinction do not make sense at this historical moment. In 1913, the object to which the term 'documentary' would later apply was still coming into being, in a process at once textual and discursive. Certain configurations of textuality were, at this moment, being developed and partly institutionalized. This split between an educational imperative – the term documentary derives from the Latin *docere*, to teach – and a mainly entertaining 'melodramatic' structure divides the text between different structures of textuality, different aims and, underpinning this, different understandings of the social functioning of cinema. On a strictly textual level, the split Brewster discerns might be read more incisively as a split between what André Gaudreault has more generally termed *iterative narration* and *singular narration*; where iteration is a level of narrative linked to an abstract and categorical intention to demonstrate certain types of facts, and singular narration is the detailed narration of key events.¹⁴ In *Traffic in Souls*, the abduction at Ellis Island and at Penn Station figure as moments of iteration. A newspaper insert reports that '50,000 Girls Disappear Yearly' and the abductions we see are two examples drawn from that larger total. The main narrative's concentration on the abduction of Lorna and the efforts of her family to rescue her figure as a shift in the text towards singularity. This departure from an iterative imperative is a move also into a clearly defined melodramatic scenario, complete with upper-class exploiter, inactive father and passive, victimized heroine. White slavery as a topic becomes

enmeshed with the conventions of cinematic narrative discourse. That is, the iterative and educational objective collides with a different project: to narrate the singular fictional example of the abduction of Lorna. ‘Public’ issues are privatized. The privileging of the individual, the familial and the dramatic through an emphasis on character and action within that narrative discourse specifies, and can exclude, the representation of issues which seemingly go beyond the narrative. The frontiers of cinematic conventions are not so easily breached.

This process of discursive interchange and transformation is visible not only on a textual level but also in the genealogy of the text. The film was apparently first conceived when Mrs S.M. Haggen, President of the Immigrant Girls Home in New York City, approached Walter MacNamara, ‘special photoplay writer’ at Universal, with the aim of producing a film to dramatize the threat of white slavery to immigrant women arriving in the USA via Ellis Island.¹⁵ Haggen was clearly part of a larger movement gathering momentum after the turn of the century, in which teachers, settlement workers, and professional patriots aimed to ‘Americanize’ immigrants and hasten the process of acculturation through which they might embrace the values and behaviour of mainstream America. Haggen’s working assumption seems to have been that film was a universal language and would hence overcome the difficulties she had had in producing leaflets to distribute amongst immigrant women arriving at Ellis Island.¹⁶ Such an understanding of the potential social functioning of cinema was pervasively invoked at this time by social reformers discussing the cinema’s emancipatory potential for a working-class immigrant audience. It is in this context that Carl Laemmle named his company ‘Universal’. Haggen’s interest here marks a moment when cinema was conceived as an agent of acculturation.

MacNamara had just written a two-reeler entitled *The Rise of Officer 174*, a film which seems to have had close links with *Traffic in Souls* in terms of both structure and content.¹⁷ Indeed, in the pamphlet Universal produced to promote, and preemptively defend, the latter film, it is noted that “*Traffic in Souls*” follows the same idea as “*Officer 174*” except that one dealt with gambling and the other deals with prostitution.¹⁸ In the earlier film, the eponymous hero solves an art theft and is promoted to detective in the first reel. He is put in charge of solving the vice problem of the city, but the underworld appeals to ‘the man higher up’ who attempts to bribe the officer and discredit him. However, the officer’s girlfriend works for the man higher up and records the plot on the dictograph, thus convicting the latter and exonerating Officer 174. This is clearly very similar to the plot of *Traffic in Souls* in which Mary Barton, the sister of the abducted Lorna and fiancee of Officer Burke, works for ‘the man higher up’ and records his discussions with the white slavers. These recordings lead to the rescue of Lorna and the conviction of Trubus. This similarity suggests that MacNamara combined Haggen’s interest

¹⁵ See *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, December 1914, p. 93, and Brownlow’s account in *Behind the Mask of Innocence*, pp. 71–80.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ There is seemingly no surviving print of this film. See the review in *The Moving Picture World*, 3 May 1913, p. 512, and Brewster’s discussion of the similarities in terms of structure, ‘*Traffic in Souls*’, p. 43.

¹⁸ ‘*Traffic in Souls*’, Universal Studios Pamphlet, Box 107, NBR.

¹⁹ Charles Musser, 'On "extras", Mary Pickford, and the red-light film: filmmaking in the United States', *Griffithiana*, no. 50, p. 151.

²⁰ These definitions come from both Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), and Michael Renov, 'Towards a poetics of documentary', in Renov (ed.), *Theorizing Documentary*.

²¹ Charlie Keil, 'Steel engines and cardboard rockets: the status of fiction and nonfiction in early cinema', *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9 (1991), p. 43.

²² Philip Rosen, 'Disjunction and ideology in a preclassical film: A Policeman's Tour of the World', *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1990), p. 21.

²³ André Gaudreault, 'Film, narrative, narration: the cinema of the Lumière brothers', in Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p. 68. Gaudreault is quoting Gérard Genette.

in some form of 'documentary', in a film text capable of education and acculturation, with an already rehearsed fiction. This fiction was itself linked to an emerging popular genre of detective films and possibly to a series of detective serials beginning from around 1910 and often featuring women leads. These serials have been seen by Charles Musser as halfway houses between the one-reeler and the multireeler, a suggestion perhaps borne out by this connection.¹⁹

This is a point where Haggen's conception of cinema crosses the border with MacNamara's in a way that mirrors, perhaps because it is productive of, the mixing of real and fictional immigrants in those scenes from Ellis Island. The film appears divided in its commitments. On the one hand, there is an aim to document and narrate certain types of situation, to participate in other 'discourses of sobriety' in an attempt to 'persuade and promote' awareness of the threat of white slavery: this is a 'call to public rather than private response'.²⁰ On the other hand, the aim is apparently to produce an entertaining, thrilling fiction which follows already familiar, and commercially successful, conventions. It is noticeable also that this shift between iteration and singularity, and between Haggen and MacNamara, is at the same time a shift away from a concern with immigrants being abducted by white slavers to a preoccupation with the abduction of a native-born 'American' woman. The relegation of iteration/'documentary' to the margins of this text, its dismissal to the opening of the text and the margins of the screen, is also a relegation of a concern with ethnicity.

By 1913 the intrication of a marginalization of the representation of ethnicity with a marginalization of nonfictional genres already had a history. This may be traced at several levels: firstly, in relation to representation in film texts; secondly, in a broader centralization of meaning production within the film industry resulting in a relegation of an ethnically conscious, locally specific, context of production and exhibition to the margins of the industry; and thirdly, in relation to a wider exclusion of 'foreign' films from US screens. Because 'the world of filmed fiction was almost exclusively white', Charlie Keil has suggested, the dichotomy of fact and fiction in early cinema 'manifests itself most clearly in the representation of people of color . . . who can be themselves within a documentary format, but are translated into blackfaced or warpainted white actors at the point of dramatic representation'.²¹ Those images from Ellis Island corroborate this in a particularly acute way, the fictional stereotypes and the real immigrants standing momentarily side by side. An earlier 'sublimation of actuality into narrative',²² the shift across what Gaudreault terms 'the "frontiers" of filmic "narrative"' visible from 1904 on, was complexly bound up with the split Keil discerns.²³ The initiation of this process of sublimation may well have been linked to a need to pin down ideologically the indeterminacy of actuality, providing a push both to the gradual elaboration of a narrator system which could cue the spectator in particular ways during the viewing process and also to

the centralization of textual control in the hands of the producers. One could certainly trace an extensive industrial marginalization of the actuality genre, in particular through the formation of the Association of Edison Licensees (AEL) in late 1907 and the agreement reached by the Association with the film exchange organization, the Film Service Association (FSA), in February 1908. This agreement explicitly prohibited the production of industrial films, advertising films and local actuality subjects, and introduced restrictions on the sales of films to schools, hospitals and amateur exhibitions, whilst setting up the reel of film as the basic industry commodity.²⁴ It is clear also that the complex developments underpinning a shift towards fictional narrative discourse simply intensifies the bifurcation of representation that Keil has outlined.

There was in fact a wider inscription of cinema within the discourses of imperialism and nationalism from 1907 onwards, manifesting itself most clearly in the gradual exclusion of other national cinemas from US screens. The concern about a 'foreign' circulation of representations of social life and behaviour, increasingly seen as very influential on the cinema's supposedly malleable spectators – recent immigrants in particular – emerged as a considerable problem in terms of the definition and control of the economic and ideological power of the cinema. As Richard Abel has suggested, the elaboration of an industrial structure for the US film industry, with the formation of the AEL, FSA and, in 1909, the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), was closely allied with the exclusion of foreign production companies and films and, in particular, the delimitation of the dominance that Pathé had over the US film industry.²⁵ The FSA claimed that it 'shut out the importation of foreign stuff . . . not suitable or good enough for the American market',²⁶ and the MPPC announced its formation to exhibitors by suggesting that the elimination of 'cheap and inferior foreign films' would encourage the patronage of 'the better class of the community'.²⁷ From 1907 on, 'foreign' films were associated with immorality, and by 1908 the pressure for films to be wholesome was 'bound up with the debate over "Americanization"', on how to train those without full citizenship to take up an American identity and 'become proper social subjects within an "American" culture'.²⁸ In the context of the film industry this debate was certainly reactivated, if indeed it had ever gone away, with the introduction of feature films in the 1910s. European companies had threatened to corner the market with longer films, which were mainly excluded from the production, distribution and exhibition system set up by the MPPC. Though often seen as 'uplifting' the cinema, these 'foreign' features were also often portrayed as immoral, particularly in their displays of sexuality and sensational violence. From 1913 on, a crusade in various sections of the trade press was launched for the production of 'American features'.²⁹

²⁴ For details see Charles Musser's account in *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 376–9.

²⁵ Richard Abel, 'The perils of Pathé, or the Americanization of the American cinema', in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 183–223.

²⁶ *The Moving Picture World*, 28 March 1908, p. 260, quoted in *ibid*, p. 192.

²⁷ 'Announcement to Exhibitors From Motion Picture Patents Company, 1 February 1909', quoted in Nancy J. Rosenblum, 'Between reform and regulation: the struggle over film censorship in progressive America, 1909–1922', *Film History*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1987), p. 310.

²⁸ Abel, 'The perils of Pathé', p. 202.

²⁹ See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 79.

The attempt to uplift the morality of cinema was caught up, then, in intense debates about the construction of an ‘American’ identity.

Within this context, the National Board of Censorship actively participated in an attempt to defend a ‘national standard’. This relates both to the formation of the Board and to its subsequent practices. For example, H.N. Marvin, in his testimony in the antitrust suit against the MPPC, asserted that ‘indecent and obscene . . . pictures imported from foreign countries’ were a principal reason for the board’s formation.³⁰ The Board thus began by in effect reinforcing the policies of the FSA and the MPPC. It is also apparent that throughout 1909 and 1910 Pathé films were rejected or returned for alteration much more frequently than films by US producers.³¹ Furthermore, the efforts of the National Board throughout the 1910s and 1920s to regulate representations of ethnicity often resulted in a repressive denial of representation. As Francis Couvares has suggested, ‘Over and again, standards that might have seemed designed to protect disempowered groups from defamation became grounds for stifling all discussion of sensitive interethnic – and intraethnic – issues’.³² As history would have it, Frederick Howe was, from 1914 on, both head of the Board of Censorship and Governor at Ellis Island, the two jobs perhaps having much in common.

Just as foreign films were restricted from 1907 on, so too was immigration. The period up to 1907 witnessed large-scale migration to the USA, intensifying a debate about the construction of an ‘American’ identity in an era of heightened national and ethnic fragmentation. The white slavery scare was an important trope within this debate, emerging most forcefully in the USA in 1907 with the publication of the first of George Kibbe Turner’s three influential articles on white slavery. In Turner’s argument, the abduction of women into prostitution was a result of conspiracy between various ethnic groups. Turner’s brand of nativism influenced later formulations of the problem of ‘white slavery’, which developed alongside the increasingly racist strain in nativist thought visible in the explosion of interest in eugenics, discussions of ‘race suicide’, countless public health studies, moral reform tracts, civic commissions, ‘docunovels’, acts of federal legislation, and so on.³³ The 1907 Federal Immigration Act is of particular relevance here: aside from increasing the power of the State to halt ‘the importation of women for immoral purposes’, the Act allowed for the establishment of an Immigration Commission to report on the effects of recent immigration on education, crime, vice, insanity and so on. Part of this report was published in 1909 in the middle of a series of debates on the implementation of a federal act designed to halt ‘the traffic in women’. The report asserted that immigration had increased ‘offenses against chastity, especially those concerned with prostitution’, further suggesting that ‘unnatural practices are brought here largely from continental Europe’.³⁴ The 1909 report became central to the formulation of the 1910 ‘White

³⁰ H.N. Marvin, quoted in Abel, *The perils of Pathé*, p. 200.

³¹ See Abel’s account, *ibid.*, and also details in Rosenblum, ‘Between reform and regulation’, p. 310.

³² Francis Couvares, ‘The good censor: race, sex, and censorship in the early cinema’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1994), p. 238.

³³ For a general discussion of the white slavery scare see Frederick K. Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology and American Law* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990). For work within film studies see Richard Maltby, ‘The social evil, the moral order and the melodramatic imagination, 1890–1915’, in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill, (eds), *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994); Shelley Stamp Lindsey, ‘Wages and sin: *Traffic in Souls* and the white slavery scare’, *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9 (1991), and ‘Is any girl safe? female spectators at the white slave films’, *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996); Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

³⁴ A copy of the report is published in the back of Francesco Cordasco and Thomas Monroe Pitkin, *The White Slave Trade: a Chapter in American Social History* (Detroit: Blaine Ethridge, 1981), pp. 58–109.

Slave Traffic Act' which made it illegal to transport a woman across state lines for 'immoral purposes'. As in the debate about 'foreign' films, the delimitation of national borders – and here even intranational borders – was enmeshed with the delimitation of moral borders. Morality emerges as the crucial dividing line, laced with a language of difference which drew on images of racial purity and sexual virtue.

There were, however, shifts within the discourse on white slavery. Before 1909, concern had been directed largely at the dangers faced by immigrant women arriving in the USA and being duped and abducted into sexual 'slavery'. The Immigration Commission Report initiated a crucial shift, however, turning attention to the potential abduction of native-born 'American' women from the streets of US cities.³⁵ It certainly seems likely that these fears were also linked to more pervasive concerns about the new-found mobility of women in a reconfigured heterosocial sphere,³⁶ though it is clear that such concerns are reinforced through their connection here with racial thinking and notions of 'whiteness'. Repositioning *Traffic in Souls* in this context is productive. The shift away from documentation of the abduction of immigrants and migrants towards sustained consideration of the abduction of a fictional individual, Lorna, seems to rehearse a change witnessed more widely within the white slavery scare. Again, this movement marginalizes concern for immigrant women: the film text transforms Haggen's interest in protecting them from abduction into a different concern. The movement within the text towards a familiar fictional structure takes place alongside this shift. A policing of cinema is also a policing of representations of ethnicity. That this process is peculiarly visible here, through the unstable configuration of textuality as well as through the glimpses it affords of Haggen's interest at the margins of the text, must relate to the text's position on the borders of a fictional classicism. The film text is only partly successful in transforming and reorienting the discursive context of debates on notions of nationhood, on the quality and integrity of 'the race', on the importation of immorality and on the role of women, into a 'cinematic language' and a 'cinematic aim/understanding' still in process of formation.

This dichotomy visible within both the text and its production history is also apparent at the level of exhibition. In the file on *Traffic in Souls* in The National Board of Review Collection there is a newspaper article on the film stating:

The Travellers Aid Society is behind the venture, has arranged for several of the leading steamship companies for the presentation of the pictures before the steerage passengers on the largest lines as a warning against bogus employment agencies that prey upon newly arrived immigrants. A number of scenes are laid around the piers and depict the methods used by the organized vice interests.³⁷

³⁵ Undated and untitled newspaper article, Box 107, NBR.

The film, it seems, was to be shown just to steerage passengers, those who could only afford tickets to travel below the water line (those travelling above the line avoided Ellis Island and the rigorous surveillance of the immigration officers). Haggen, too, apparently exhibited the film on board steamers, at the quarantine station and in the detention sheds at Ellis Island, an exhibition context which brings to mind Judith Mayne's ironic suggestion that 'movie houses and nickelodeons were the back rooms of the Statue of Liberty'.³⁸

³⁸ Judith Mayne, 'Immigrants and spectators', *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1982), p. 118. For Haggen's exhibitions see *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, December 1914, p. 93, and Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*, pp. 79–80.

³⁹ 'Moving pictures to get immigrants west', *The Nickelodeon*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1909), p. 130.

⁴⁰ *The Moving Picture World*, 20 November 1926, p. 3.

⁴¹ Letter from Frederick Wallis to The National Board of Review, 11 May 1921, Box 36, NBR.

⁴² Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*, p. 519.

⁴³ Noel Carroll, 'From real to reel: entangled in the nonfiction film', *Philosophic Exchange*, no. 14 (1983), p. 24. See also Dirk Eitzen, 'When is a documentary? documentary as a mode of reception', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1995).

There are some historical reference points for this exhibition context. As early as 1909 *The Nickelodeon* reported that films were being shown on board immigrant steamers in order to persuade people to move West and not settle in the well-populated East.³⁹ Which films were shown is not indicated, though it is evident that they were intended to police immigration. By 1926 the practice of showing films to steerage passengers on their way to the USA was becoming well established. An article in *The Moving Picture World* entitled 'Immigrants on Leviathan Witness First Americanization Pictures' noted that 'Thanks to motion pictures, immigrants will have some knowledge of the ideals of the United States even before they set foot on American soil'. Will Hays, in a speech at a luncheon to celebrate this, stated that 'the value of this Americanization work by motion pictures cannot be measured'.⁴⁰ From 1919 The National Board of Review organized regular screenings on Ellis Island, coordinating a programme by persuading distributors to lend them films no longer in general distribution. In a letter to the Board, the Commissioner of Ellis Island thanked the Board and pointed to the films' 'beneficial effect upon the spirit of these people', further noting that 'The immigrants enjoy the educational films . . . and relish the comedies'.⁴¹

As Kevin Brownlow remarks, it seems likely that only parts of *Traffic in Souls* were shown at Ellis Island.⁴² These were presumably those quasidocumentary/iterative opening reels, constructed in the context of exhibition precisely as 'documentary'. As suggested, the complex links between a realm of documentary and a realm of fictional cinema make all attempts to distinguish between them on a purely textual level deeply problematic. Documentaries are characterized not simply by a particular configuration of textuality but by the setting in place of a certain interpretive frame, what Noel Carroll has termed the 'indexing' of film texts.⁴³ In this context, the 'indexing' of *Traffic in Souls* at Ellis Island for those immigrants arriving, or waiting in detention and quarantine sheds, would seem to suggest that the text was presented, and very possibly perceived, as documenting a frightening reality that was waiting for women emigrants just across the water in the USA.

This question of 'indexing' clearly also has a historical dimension. In pre-classical cinema, as Charles Musser has emphasized, meanings could often be structured by exhibitors who could cut films together in programmes, or by lecturers who could impose ideological order on

⁴⁴ Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990).

films.⁴⁴ The central role of the exhibitor meant that fictional material could easily be interpolated into nonfictional material, or vice versa, demonstrating how the exhibition practices of the day facilitated exchange between fictional and nonfictional elements. The normalization of fictional narrative multishot films located the determination and indexing of textual meaning in the production companies. The concomitant marginalization of an actuality genre and of nonfilmic acts and activities, or their subordination to the film, effectively unhooked filmic representation and the viewing situation from any form of material presence such as might exist when editorial control is located outside the text. This streamlining of the cinema is further marked with the development of the feature film from 1912 on, which mandated prolonged attention and absorption. The increased derealization of theatre space concomitant with the creation of the classical spectator as a hypothetical term of cinematic discourse effectively eliminated the potential for cinema to function as an alternative organization of public experience. In particular, as Miriam Hansen has suggested, this centralization of meaning production and invention of spectatorship absorbed and transformed working-class and immigrant audiences into a unified subject of and for mass-cultural consumption.⁴⁵ The gradual eradication of ethnic vaudeville acts from the film programme after 1909 was a central process in this relegation of an ethnically conscious, locally specific, context of exhibition. It is clear that a policing of the cinema was not simply a policing of films but also of their mode of consumption and their consumers.

Universal, for their part, exhibited *Traffic in Souls* at Joe Weber's Theatre on Twenty-Ninth Street and Broadway. It was said to be the first Broadway-released feature film not based on a famous novel or play. Weber's Theatre was owned by the Shubert brothers, influential theatrical producers who had an interest in cinema and had invested in *Traffic in Souls*.⁴⁶ They had formed the Shubert Feature Film Booking Company initially to distribute *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt* (Universal, 1912) and after the success of this film had invested in *Traffic in Souls*. Though soon established as a predominantly dramatic form, feature films did initially include many nonfiction subjects. It is clear that multireel features coincided with, and helped establish, an 'uplift' of cinema and of perceptions of cinema. The Shuberts' interest in cinema can be seen as symptomatic of a broader recognition and construction of the medium as an art form. In 1911 the first full-length fiction feature films, such as *Dante's Inferno*, brought a new recognition to the claims of defenders of the film industry that cinema was a legitimate art form. Sarah Bernhardt's appearance in several films during 1912 buttressed this claim. Several other multireel films based on literary classics were released from 1912 on, and feature films with artistic reputations became increasingly plentiful in late 1913 as the Famous Players Film Company released three features per month (these films were usually of four or more reels). The link

⁴⁵ Hansen, *From Babel to Babylon*.

⁴⁶ See the accounts in Terry Ramsays, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (London: Frank Cass and Co. 1926), and Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*. For more on the Shuberts see Kevin Lewis, 'A world across from Broadway: the Shuberts and the movies', *Film History* vol. 1, no. 1 (1987), pp. 39–52.

between the theatrical and film worlds was further intensified on the level of production when in 1914 a number of agreements were established between producers of theatre and film for plays to be filmed. David Belasco, John Cort, and Oliver Morosco affiliated themselves with the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company; the Shuberts went into coproduction with Jules Brulatour, who had been instrumental in forming the World Film Corporation.

Throughout 1912 and 1913 the use and function of multireel films was in some flux. On the one hand, nonfiction films attracted a varied middle-class audience and certainly helped to associate cinema with middle-class morality. On the other hand, the gradual rapprochement between the theatre world and the film world produced a perception of cinema as art. This led to the production of feature-length dramatic subjects – and ultimately to their centrality to the institution of the cinema – and to the relegation of nonfiction subjects to support slots in the film programme. As in an earlier moment of film history, the production of fictional texts had numerous advantages – ease of production, more controllable representation, broader appeal to a more heterogeneous audience. This time, though, such advantages could be contained in a form that as ‘art’ would still offer an association with middle-class morality.

Traffic in Souls has a complex relationship with the shift in the status of cinema attendant upon the rise of the multireeler. George Loane Tucker had stated that he wanted to make the film after seeing a number of plays representing white slavery performed on Broadway.⁴⁷ The pamphlet Universal produced to promote the film suggested that ‘It is along the lines of the plays “The Lure” and “The Fight”’.⁴⁸ A legal case brought by Oscar Hammerstein against David Belasco for exhibiting *Traffic in Souls* at the Republic Theatre in New York also throws light on the shifting relationship. The theatre was contracted to produce only first-class productions and Hammerstein contended that ‘the Universal film not only is not first class, but is indecent’.⁴⁹ Belasco countered by arguing that motion pictures were now on a level with the theatre and hence could represent what was being represented on the stage. In effect, Belasco was, as *Variety* noted, ‘denying the Hammerstein claim that a theatre’s association with movies is degrading’.⁵⁰ Hammerstein won the case in the first court but lost on appeal, this final judgement offering legal support for Belasco’s argument.

The emergence of the multireeler ultimately constitutes a crucial moment in the delimitation of what would become the predominant form of cinema, the feature-length narrative fiction film exhibited in purpose-built cinemas. It is clear, as the Belasco–Hammerstein court case suggests, that around the time of *Traffic in Souls* there was a profound uncertainty over the definition of cinema. In terms of exhibition, the nickelodeons continued alongside converted theatres and the newly-developed movie palaces. In terms of production,

⁴⁷ Recorded in Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights*, p. 613, and noted also in the *Variety* review, 28 November 1913, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Universal Studios Pamphlet, Box 107, NBR.

⁴⁹ Quoted in *Variety*, 19 December 1913, p. 17.

⁵⁰ *Variety*, 23 January 1914, p. 11.

multireelers began to be made in considerable numbers, at least from 1914, alongside the continuing production of short one-reel films. As *Motography* commented in April 1913:

Today the long feature does not fit the small theatres and the small theatre does not fit the long feature. That is a pity; but it will not stop the production of features. Whether they will ever get together or how both will be taken care of by the evolution of the industry, is for the future to decide.⁵¹

⁵¹ 'Those long features'.
Motography vol. 9, no. 8, 19
April 1913, p. 294.

The ultimate tying together of shorts and features on an exhibition level from the late 1910s, where shorts functioned as a support act in the movie theatre's evening programme, marks a significant moment in the genealogy of classicism. Such a process is inextricably linked with an act of policing. As Peter Kramer has suggested, Hollywood's move to feature production and the classical standard resulted in the suppression of various 'deviant' elements from the standard multireel feature film and their reappearance in Hollywood's marginal production and exhibition practices.⁵²

⁵² Peter Kramer, 'The double standard of classical Hollywood cinema', paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies Annual Conference, Bozeman, Montana, June 1988.

For Kramer, the resurgence of the slapstick genre after a hiatus from around 1910, and its proliferation after 1915, is linked to this interdependence between standard and deviation. The Keystone Studio, for example, was established in 1912, and the mocking of the police and general anarchism and immorality associated with that studio was ultimately to find a place near the opening of the movie programme. More important for my argument here is the development of the newsreel which had become, by 1911, the most important type of nonfiction film. Pathé's newsreel began in the USA in August 1911, Vitagraph's newsreel emerged one month later, a newsreel distributed by the Motion Picture Sales Company emerged in early 1912, Gaumont's in 1912, Selig's in 1914, and so on. By 1918 the Educational Films Corporation of America was placing its short educational films in conventional theatres across the country. The unpredictability of the nonfictional had been adapted to the exigencies of the release system, and the weekly release pattern of the newsreels worked also to regularize filmgoing. In short, it seems that elements that had previously existed within individual films were now parcelled out to different parts of the classical film programme. *Traffic in Souls* would appear to stand at the threshold of this process.

The question of morality quickly moved to centre stage in the debate about *Traffic in Souls*. The positions taken on the film by Universal, by various reformers and reform organizations, and by the National Board of Censorship illustrate how the issue of morality became enmeshed at this moment with the question of the fictional or factual basis of film texts. Universal's positioning and promotion of *Traffic in Souls* can be seen as a clear attempt to secure the borders of the text from outside intervention by claiming that it had a basis in the real world and was 'an authentic exposé' of the white slave traffic. In

⁵³ *Toledo Blade*, 13 December 1913, n.p.

⁵⁴ Roger Odin, 'A semio-pragmatic approach to the documentary film', in Warren Buckland (ed.), *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), p. 229.

⁵⁵ George Kneeland, *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City* (New York: Bureau of Social Hygiene, 1913).

⁵⁶ John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in *ibid.* p. iv.

⁵⁷ The 1910 Grand Jury report, quoted in Cordasco and Pitkin, *The White Slave Trade*, p. 34.

publicity preceding the film it was claimed to be 'based upon the Rockefeller white slave report and upon the grand jury investigation undertaken by D.A. Whitman' and had been 'staged at the suggestion of a number of prominent social workers, who felt it was the best way to make public the lessons to be drawn from the vice investigations'.⁵³ The invocation of these authorities is clearly linked to an attempt to associate the text discursively with the institutions of Progressive social reform, an association actively sought by many members of the film industry as part of an 'uplift' of the cinema from 1909 on. This is predicated upon an attempt to tie the fictional to the factual, effectively constructing an 'enunciator who functions as a *real origin*', an operation that, as Roger Odin has suggested, 'founds the process of *documentarization*'.⁵⁴ For Universal this process was evidently seen as a way to head off reform concern. Nevertheless, the film text differs considerably from the reform document, which is not simply translated to the screen but actually transformed in the transition. Furthermore, the reform response to the text problematizes its tying together of fiction and fact, ultimately calling for the production of a frontier between the two realms in a process that was effectively to isolate the 'factual' from the film industry's principal remit, namely to 'entertain'. I want to approach the invocation of the reform document as providing a factual basis for the text and the complex textual and reform-orientated disengagement from this stance as a further site of instability around this text and this moment in film history.

The Rockefeller white slave report invoked by Universal must be George Kneeland's *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City*, published by the Rockefeller-financed Bureau of Social Hygiene in early 1913.⁵⁵ There are, however, three main differences between the stance taken on 'the vice traffic' by the Kneeland report and by *Traffic in Souls*. Firstly, the report is a direct product of Progressive social reform, whereas in the film text Trubus, head of the vice traffic, is also head of an International Purity and Reform League and a Citizens League. He is a reformer and a white slaver. The text seems then to stand directly at odds with its positioning by Universal as a product of reform discourse. Secondly, the Kneeland report denied the existence of a centre to the vice traffic. In its introduction, Rockefeller suggested that the vice traffic was a dispersed 'network which had been elaborated below the surface of society'.⁵⁶ The 1910 Grand Jury report – which Rockefeller had headed – had also noted that 'a trafficking in the bodies of women does exist and is carried on by individuals acting for their own individual benefit'.⁵⁷ In *Traffic in Souls* Trubus figures as the 'man higher up', heading the whole white slave network. The traffic is thus portrayed as a corporate structure, similar perhaps to other 'trusts' that were the subject of increasing criticism in the political and economic discourses of the period. This would include, of course, the film industry after the 1912 initiation of the Federal Government's antitrust suit: Universal were outside 'the

⁵⁸ Richard Maltby notes this link in 'The social evil'.

'trust' and the film's representation of an evil trust may well be implicated in a different political struggle.⁵⁸ The text seems to want to have it both ways here. On the one hand, the traffic is an extensive trust; on the other, it is run by one person, enabling a repositioning of the issue of white slavery into the realm of individual pathology (Trubus's greed and social climbing). The latter is typical of classical Hollywood's concentration on individuated characters and personal agency. Indeed, it is a distinguishing mark of the detective and crime genre in which this film participates.

The third difference between the reform document and the film centres on representations of the police. The Kneeland report implicates the police in the white slave traffic, suggesting that the traffic is only possible via a complex system of graft and bribery. The police are seen as inadequate in what Kneeland termed 'the proper surveillance' of urban space, so that the prostitute could 'slowly, but surely, establish herself securely under the eye that does not see and the ear that does not hear'. Kneeland reported that on one occasion of abduction 'the victim called loudly for the police and though an officer stood on the other side of the street, his eyes were withheld and his ears were stopped'.⁵⁹

Traffic in Souls, however, is effectively a police drama, clearly drawing on the earlier *The Rise of Officer 174*. Universal were keen to promote this connection, stating in the pamphlet on *Traffic in Souls* that 'Mr George L. Tucker, who staged the picture, desires to remind the Board of Censors of his pictures entitled "Officer 174", which the Board highly commended in a letter to the director'.⁶⁰ In *Traffic in Souls* Officer Burke, the fiance of the older sister Mary, emerges as the hero. He singlehandedly rescues the two Swedish immigrants and the migrant woman abducted in the first two reels. Offered a bribe by the white slavers he refuses it and arrests them; the film alluding here to current beliefs concerning police corruption.

Officer Burke is in fact the hinge point around which the two narratives and the two configurations of textuality swivel. After the rescue of the immigrants and migrant, Burke returns to the station and is commended by his captain. The next scene shows Lorna being abducted from the sweet shop where she works, an action which, in Ben Brewster's words, sets off the main narrative.⁶¹ Burke is now assigned the task of rescuing Lorna, and this is achieved through the combined efforts of Burke and the father of Mary and Lorna. After Lorna has been abducted, Mary is appointed to a job as Trubus's secretary, and on her first day at work is asked to clean up the dictagraph that Trubus uses to talk to his 'go-between' in the vice traffic. She recognizes the voice of the slaver who abducted Lorna and traces the wire of the dictagraph down to the office below. She alerts Officer Burke and together they hatch a plan to catch Trubus out with the help of Mary's father's invention of a device to record dictagraph conversations. The rolls of recorded conversation are taken to Officer

⁵⁹ Kneeland, *Commercialized Prostitution*, pp. 27, 57.

⁶⁰ Universal Studios Pamphlet, Box 107, NBR.

⁶¹ Brewster, 'Traffic in Souls', p. 43.

Burke's captain who tells Trubus, 'the invention of the father of the girl you sought to ruin will convict you'. Unlike the police in the Kneeland report, whose 'eyes were withheld . . . and ears were stopped', the ears of the police extend through urban space, secretly recording criminality (and patriarchally surveilling the daughter's sexuality). Officer Burke locates the brothel where Lorna is being held and kills the white slaver in a dramatic shootout on a rooftop. The film closes with Burke and Mary visiting the police captain to seek leave to get married. They tell the captain, 'We'll name the first one after you', a joke ending which, as Brewster notes, was to become something of a cliche in the thriller genre but was certainly unusual at the time. The film participates in an already popular genre of films about detection and policing and initiates conventions that were to become central to the continuing elaboration of dramas of policing.

The centrality of the theme of policing is intriguing. Not only does the film take a different stance from the Kneeland report, it also stands apart from a series of earlier films which represented overt, and often unpunished, acts of criminality.⁶² Association with criminality was central to the denigration of cinema before 1909, and the reform of cinema involved reforming its representations of criminality. It is significant that the Board of Censorship's first mission statement included the aim 'to eliminate obscene pictures of crime-for-crime's sake from the New York moving picture show'.⁶³ Similarly, *The Moving Picture World*'s early 1909 call for restraint in filmic representation centred on films representing the interior of prisons and police stations and the portrayal of contemporary sensational crime.⁶⁴ Later, the Board stipulated that 'The results of the crime should be in the long run disastrous to the criminal so that the impression is that crime will inevitably find one out. The result (punishment) should always take a reasonable proportion of the film'.⁶⁵

The gradual elaboration of a set of conventions for the representation of criminality initiates a literal policing of the cinema. For its adherence to these conventions, *Traffic in Souls* was widely praised, both by trade press reviews and, ultimately, by the National Board of Censorship. *The Moving Picture World*, for example, wrote:

the forces of law and order, represented by many fine types of policemen, are upheld throughout the six parts of the pictures. . . . The treatment of the police side of the story is deserving of all praise. The views of the station are many. We get a look-in on the camaraderie of the bluecoats off duty and we see some of the dangers and temptation to which they are subjected when on duty.⁶⁶

The dynamics of the film industry intervened in the film's articulation of the Kneeland report (and of more general debates about policing and white slavery). That is to say, although the film participates in the recirculation of discourses outside the cinema it does so in a manner peculiar to the developing conventions of cinema. The film text

⁶² The list of these films is extensive. For a preliminary consideration see Daniel Czitrom, 'The politics of performance: from theatre licensing to movie censorship in turn-of-the-century New York', *American Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (1992), pp. 539–42; and my 'Mapping the city: early, motion pictures of the "underworld" of New York City', *OverHere* (forthcoming).

⁶³ Quoted in Czitrom, 'The politics of performance', p. 545.

⁶⁴ *The Moving Picture World*, 2 January 1909, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Maltby, 'The social evil', p. 230.

⁶⁶ *The Moving Picture World*, 22 November 1913, p. 849.

mediates, modifies and reconstructs broader debates on white slavery, and the specific position outlined by Kneeland, in its own way.

A further aspect of policing and the text relates not to content and thematics but to forms or techniques of representation. The representation of a technology capable of transcending time and space and the thematization of surveillance find a different level of articulation in the text's elaboration of omniscient narration. This omniscience is characteristic of a mapping and policing of urban space visible in a developing urban sociology, in the reports of 'tourists' from various social classes, in an entire literature of detection, in statistical studies, and so on. Franco Moretti sees in this elaboration of new mechanisms of surveillance a 'totalitarian aspiration towards a transparent society', quoting Sherlock Holmes's famous remark to Watson as an exemplary articulation of this aspiration: 'My dear fellow, if we could fly out that great window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on . . .'.⁶⁷ In *Traffic in Souls* this fantasy is rendered almost literal by the combined surveillance of the dictaphone and the police, a surveillance mirrored by an omniscient narration which permits the spectator to hover over the city and peep into the darkest recesses of criminality. Such a structure of omniscience is central to the wider elaboration of a fictional narrative cinema, emerging most forcefully in the Biograph shorts from 1909 (which, as Brewster suggests, *Traffic in Souls* resembles) and developing in postwar classicism. The imbrication of that structure with broader social systems of legality, supervision and regulation suggests, perhaps, that a certain configuration of cinematic textuality reinscribes and supplements social mechanisms of policing and regulation. In short, attention must be paid not only to a policing *of* the cinema but also to a policing *through* the cinema.

The film text's transformation of the text of the reform document is indicative of the fluid, confused and uncertain borders between cinema and reform discourse at this moment. The reform response to the film text is available now primarily through The National Board of Censorship's response, itself an outgrowth of Progressive reform and a site for struggles over definitions, understandings and regulations of cinema. The Board clearly anticipated problems with the film, and so invited representatives of a variety of reform organizations to view it. These included the Committee of Fourteen, the City Vigilance Committee, the Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis Society and the Travellers Aid Society. A letter to executive members of the Board of Censorship inviting them to view the film also noted that 'the broader question of the propriety of the treatment of these darker social problems through the medium of the stage or motion pictures remains to be considered, and also the question as to whether it is rightly within the province of the National Board of Censorship to interfere with such public discussions through motion pictures'.⁶⁸ The film was

⁶⁷ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 136.

⁶⁸ Letter to members of the Advisory Committee, 21 October 1913, Box 107, NBR.

clearly seen as a test case in cinema censorship and in cinema's legitimacy in representing 'social problems'.

At the reform viewing of the film responses were generally positive. Some reform reviewers did comment on the unrealistic representation of the police (Miss Wilson of the Censoring Committee suggested that, 'Refusing the bribe was too good to be true').⁶⁹ There was more general concern about the role of policing in the film, several of the reviewers suggesting that it should concentrate less on the rescue of Lorna and more on the terrible suffering of white slave victims. Mr Percy Mackaye of the Civic Theater Movement suggested that 'the ending is wrong in that it seems to show that justice is always meted out to offenders', and Mr Whitin of the Committee of Fourteen for the Suppression of Raines Law Hotels argued 'there is an over-emphasis on the rescue side and . . . this over-emphasis militated against the moral effect the pictures should have'. In a sort of summary of this trend of response, Mr Reynolds, Assistant District Attorney, asserted that 'the picture should be modified in the end to make it less hysterical and more *real*' (emphasis mine).⁷⁰ The question of making the film 'more real' emerged as central in the arguments of a number of reformers. Mrs Brown, her affiliation not noted, suggested that, 'If the story was carried out in more detail as to how girls are influenced and brought under the control of men, the picture would have greater value'. Without this detail it was possible that 'girls seeing this picture would not realize their relationship to the story'. In conclusion, she said, 'The picture should be made more *real* to get results' (emphasis mine).⁷¹

These responses call for two things. Firstly, a more realistic approach to the subject which would eschew the convention of the happy ending, concentrating less on the policing and rescue of the white slaves and more on the representation of the work of the white slavers: in effect, an extension of the first two quasi-documentary reels. Secondly, and linked to this, is a call for a greater policing of the point of view of the story and the ideological effectiveness of the text, what Mrs Brown calls 'the relationship to the story'. For these reform reviewers, such a policing is possible in a configuration of textuality linked to an iterative and quasi-documentary aim. However, for a number of other reform reviewers this greater realism brought with it a series of problems linked, as Francis Couvares suggests, with the danger of 'showing an element of desirability in sexual expressiveness, consumption and urban nightlife [which] might . . . work *against* the purposes of social improvement'.⁷² It was the perspective of this second group of reviewers which the Board of Censorship ultimately endorsed, effectively initiating a condemnation of a documentary-like aim and elevating an entertaining melodramatic structure to the mainstream of US cinema. With five fairly minor cuts, the film was approved for commercial exhibition by the Board.

The concern, adumbrated by Mackaye, Whitin, Reynolds, Brown

⁶⁹ 'Record of the meeting held at Universal Film Company on October 27, 1913', Box 107, NBR.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Francis Couvares also picks up on Mrs Brown's comments in 'The good censor', p. 243.

⁷² *Ibid.*

and others, with representing successful policing action in the text is transformed in the Board's response. This structure, divorced from the *real*, is seen as imperative to a clear articulation of morality. Here we approach the discursive erection of that seemingly ontological frontier of fact and fiction, though it is at this moment confused and uncertain, with Universal clearly attempting to draw on the realm of 'fact' to substantiate the text and the Board cautiously drawing back from that association. Thus, one of the Board's suggested cuts was an intertitle in the text noting that '50,000 Girls Disappear Yearly' and citing as its source the Travellers Vigilance Society. The Board memo states: 'The idea is not to change the number of girls lost, but simply to relieve the Travellers Vigilance Society of the responsibility for the statement'.⁷³ The Board explicitly wanted to draw away from the anchoring of the text in reform discourse, leaving it to stand alone as fiction.

This stance becomes clearer in relation to the Board's action over a film released shortly after *Traffic in Souls* entitled *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* (1913). A number of scholars have commented on the disparity of treatment meted out to these two films and I want briefly to extend this point and consider it in relation to emerging distinctions between fictional and documentary material in the creation of a multireel classicism.⁷⁴ *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* was produced by Samuel London who had worked within Rockefeller's Bureau of Social Hygiene, a fact stressed by London in the publicity for the film, which was claimed to be 'based on Real existing facts gathered by U.S. Government Investigator Samuel H. London, the man the Rockefeller [report] uses as an authority on White Slavery'.⁷⁵ The familiar strategy of surrounding the text with references to reform discourse was extended here by constructing the enunciator as real *within* the text. The extant version of the film begins with five titles proclaiming its authenticity, claiming it is based on 'facts gathered during [London's] international investigation of the white slave traffic', 'the only authentic white slave picture ever made', and 'a pictorial report of the life and habits of those engaged or associated in The White Slave Traffic . . . as they are in truth and fact, without any exaggeration or fictional indulgence'.⁷⁶ The film thus offered itself as a 'quasi-documentary', both through these references to extratextual authorities and again through a textual aesthetic which concentrated on realism. London had in fact filmed in the red light district of New Orleans, 'portrayed with an accuracy', *The Outlook* commented, 'which left little to the imagination'.⁷⁷ *Variety* too noted that 'The setting is real, the girls actual, the "sailors" apparently chance philanderers caught by the camera'.⁷⁸ London's strategy was clearly an extension of Universal's and of those reform reviewers who had criticized the melodrama of *Traffic in Souls*: to cover the film in references to reform discourse, to approach a 'greater realism' eschewing 'fictional indulgence' in the documentation of facts for a (supposedly) educative function.

⁷³ Record of the meeting at Universal, 1913.

⁷⁴ See, in particular, Couvares 'The good censor'; Maltby, 'The social evil'; Lindsey, 'Wages and sin'; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence*.

⁷⁵ *Variety*, 12 December 1913, p. 12.

⁷⁶ The incomplete version is housed at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

⁷⁷ *The Outlook*, 14 February 1914, p. 348.

⁷⁸ *Variety*, 12 December 1913, p. 12.

The Board of Censorship entered into a process of negotiation with London, suggesting some changes to the film. These called for the repression of some material and the addition of other material:

Greatly reduce (by at least two-thirds of its length) the scene showing what purports to be the New Orleans crib district, leaving these scenes only long enough to carry the actual action taking place in them absolutely necessary to the story.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Board letter to Samuel London, dated 18 December 1913, Box 107, NBR.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Board letters dated 22 December 1913, and 17 February 1914.

⁸² Board memo to the Members of the General Committee, 16 December 1913, Box 107, NBR.

⁸³ Board letter to London, dated 22 December 1913.

⁸⁴ 'Statement on sex photoplays', undated, Box 171, NBR.

It is clear that the profilmic real was to be introduced only where it was useful for the story, that documentation of actuality was to be subservient to the fiction. Furthermore, the fictional material was to instigate a form of policing, with additional 'scenes showing the punishment of the trafficker'. This in turn led to John Collier's extraordinarily vitriolic suggestion as to how the film should end, with the woman who becomes a prostitute 'becoming a down and out hag, a victim of disease, a suicide, a specimen for the doctor's dissecting table, and filling a grave in Potter's field (or something like this)'.⁸⁰ Collier calls for a framing moralistic narrative, a policing of criminality and 'deviant' sexuality of the sort provided by *Traffic in Souls*. In finally condemning *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* then, the Board argued that 'it is not sufficiently dramatic', that 'the subject is not made unattractive' and that the film is 'an illustration rather than education'.⁸¹

Further concern was articulated by the Board over the exhibition of the picture: who would see it and what readings different audiences might take from it. In a memo distributed to the General Committee a week after the initial viewing of *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* it was noted that the film had been shown 'to private bodies of a sociological nature' and only submitted to the Board after its first commercial exhibition.⁸² It was the circulation of the text beyond this select audience that helped prompt the Board to reject the film: 'In condemning the picture the Board realized that it was considering the presentation of the film before a popular rather than a selected audience'.⁸³ The Board noted elsewhere that commercial audiences were 'not composed of people of culture and refinement, but are made up largely of members of the lower middle class, and generally speaking, with the more light minded of these'.⁸⁴ The concern is about the propriety of disseminating knowledge about sexuality to lower-middle-class audiences through a medium that was becoming inextricably linked to a commercial and entertainment imperative.

It is clear that the process of censorship, and the understanding of the social functioning of cinema implicit in it, in this instance actually produced categories of films. *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* emerges as a prototypical documentary in its engagement with 'truth and fact' and its lack of 'fictional indulgence' – and is condemned for this. *Traffic in Souls* is sanctioned precisely for its *fictional indulgence*, its framing of fact within the parameters of fiction. The Board went on

⁸⁵ 'Special Bulletin', 9 February 1914, Box 171, NBR.

to attempt to clarify their stance with a 'Special Bulletin' on films dealing with white slavery, noting cinema's difficulty in functioning as an educative medium because of the 'lack of dialogue and the necessity of emphasis on the dramatic'.⁸⁵ The two films were caught in the midst of a divide in the process of formation. The erection of a boundary with the two films on either side stands as an important moment in a wider discursive delimitation of the function of cinema at the border of a developing multireel classicism. The border was reinforced by the Supreme Court decision of 1915 which deemed cinema 'a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit' and hence denied it the constitutional guarantees of free speech. The Justices noted also that films could be 'more insidious in corruption by a pretence of worthy purposes', a statement which echoes the National Board of Censorship's criticism of *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*.⁸⁶ The Supreme Court decision stands as a landmark in debates about cinema and its role as education or entertainment, bringing to an end – for the time being at least – a series of debates that had reached a degree of intensity in 1913. If cinema had not been conceptualized as a purely fictional entertainment medium before this decision, it certainly was so afterwards.

The marginalization of an educative role for cinema was neither self-evident nor clearly defined, and was marked by instabilities and tensions throughout the period up to 1915. Elements in the US film industry had self-consciously drawn on reform discourse from 1907 onwards, but this gradually became characterized by the kind of ambiguity apparent in *Traffic in Souls*. 'Uplift strategies' could continue but would be shifted onto the construction of cinema as 'art'. Film as art became an alternative to film as instruction. This was certainly in part a result of economic calculations on the part of the film industry, but it was also linked to an attempt to separate the cinema from the realm of the political.

Such a process was noticeable in the debates about a number of overtly political films made from 1907 on by trade unionists, labour organizations, socialists and communists. As Steven J. Ross has shown, a series of films was produced which clothed political messages in melodramatic conventions, often overtly mixing 'documentary' footage with fictional narrative.⁸⁷ The 1913 five-reel feature *From Dusk to Dawn*, for example, showed successful strike action to gain union recognition led by a laundress and an iron moulder, action resulting in the election of the Socialist Party and the marriage of the protagonists. Incorporated into the film was footage shot in slums and factories, of strikes, Labor Day parades and speeches by prominent labour leaders. The director Frank E. Wolfe was a Socialist Party activist and union organizer. He argued that the film would 'be successful as an instructor [only if] it amuses while it instructs'.⁸⁸ Such films became controversial, providing an occasion for discussion about the deleterious consequences for the film industry

⁸⁷ Steven J. Ross, 'Struggles for the screen: workers, radicals, and the political uses of silent film', *American Historical Review*, vol. 96, no. 2, (1991).

⁸⁸ Frank E. Wolfe quoted in *ibid.* p. 342.

⁸⁹ Frederick Howe, quoted in Kay Sloan, 'A cinema in search of itself: ideology of the social problem film during the silent era', *Cineaste*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1985), p. 34.

of merging cinema and politics. No less a figure than Frederick Howe argued that when the cinema 'becomes the daily press of industrial groups, of classes, of socialism, syndicalism, and radical opinion', when films 'tend to excite class feeling or tend to bring discredit upon the agencies of government', then there will be a widespread backlash against that cinema.⁸⁹ Films, it was felt, should be entertaining, primarily fictional, and distinct from politics. There should be a clear division between real-world talk and fictional discourse. Nonfiction films were excluded from the mainstream of the film industry by a variety of forces, and by the 1920s had mutated into documentaries and newsreels.

The oppositions set up here between power and discourse, politics and aesthetics, are central to the definition of a space for cinema, its gradual (re)definition as distinct from other realms (from journalism, historiography, social reform debates, the 'political'). Out of a heterogeneity that works on several different levels emerges something we call 'classicism'. This heterogeneity is peculiarly visible in *Traffic in Souls*. Indeed, if the year 1913 might be likened, in Charles Musser's wonderful phrase, to 'the midpoint of a dissolve' in film history, *Traffic in Souls* can be seen as a film which straddles that moment when one image begins to fade as another becomes clearer.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Musser, 'On "extras"', p. 149.

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Travels with Sally Potter's *Orlando*: gender, narrative, movement

JULIANNE PIDDUCK

1 Teresa de Lauretis, 'Desire in narrative', in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 103–57.

2 Mary Ann Doane, 'The moving image: pathos and the maternal', in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 70–95.

In her essay 'Desire in narrative', Teresa de Lauretis¹ identifies an overarching structural narrative economy of gendered stasis and movement. This formula scripts the male subject as dynamic hero who moves through narrative time and space: meanwhile, back in the kitchen, the female term typically represents stasis, home and hearth. The female character, then, is figured as social and imaginative constraint – a threshold or destination for the male protagonist's inner and outer journeys of self-realization and social transformation. Mary Ann Doane² extends such a gendered economy to spatiotemporal patterns of genre. She suggests that the more dynamic narratives and open landscapes signifying freedom of movement and possibility correspond to male address, while cluttered interiors and narrative constraint correspond to female address. The notion of female narrative constraint is manifested textually and historically in gendered codes of corporeal and geographical mobility – a skewed actual and imagined access to social space and agency.

Doane cites the Western as the 'masculine' genre *par excellence*, while the costume drama, with its precise attention to costume and set design, and a meandering, detail-rich, languorous quality of event may be seen according to this schema as a quintessentially 'female' genre. Observing the costume drama's obsession with the alternatively luscious and claustrophobic subtleties of decorum and visual style, it could be argued this genre intimately explores a particular historical quality of white, bourgeois, social constraint – an experience rendered explicitly around gender relations and femininity. However, Sally

Potter's *Orlando* (1992) does not fit neatly as a 'typical' costume drama. Perhaps the general descriptive terms of movement and constraint are qualified, fleshed out, problematized when applied to a particular text. What has come to fascinate me in this film is the attenuated dynamism of character movement traced out by a protagonist who changes, at least on the surface, from male to female. Even as she/he undertakes an audacious journey through four hundred years of English bourgeois and imperial history, *Orlando* proves for the most part a rather inept protagonist.

The slowness and uncertainty of *Orlando*'s progress coincides with what I believe to be an explicit play (in both Virginia Woolf's source novel and Potter's film adaptation) upon gendered conventions of narrative movement. According to de Lauretis, part of the project of feminist film criticism and filmmaking has been the production of new forms of discourse, new forms of narrative which can 'construct the terms of reference of another measure of desire'. Potter's *Orlando*, like her earlier projects *Thriller* (1979) and *The Gold Diggers* (1984), playfully takes up this challenge. The following detailed account of the film's precise – and in some ways idiosyncratic – treatment of gendered space, time and movement raises interesting questions about these emergent feminist desires. Further, as an exception can illuminate the rule, this filmmaker's deliberate tinkering with general patterns of narrative and film form as well as with the particular conventions of costume drama, foregrounds cinematic norms of gendered movement and constraint.

In this essay, I will elucidate several different qualities of gendered movement in *Orlando*. Through the term 'movement' I address, variably, the spatiotemporal issues of costume, decor and narrative tempo and the psychological dimension of character development, as well as narrative and imaginative historical and geographical voyages. Working from literary accounts of the pull of narrative through time and space, I first develop a detailed description of these layers of movement and stillness. Then, using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of chronotope as a bridge, I work outwards from textual issues of narrative movement towards a 'preferred' audience for this text: a dispersed feminist audience. Drawing from the notion of the journey as a structuring logic of narrative, I would even go so far as to say that *Orlando* develops a utopian feminist voyage of 'becoming' which can delicately 'move', inspire or amuse this audience. In a sense, Potter updates and screens Woolf's iconic feminist text through Tilda Swinton's feminist heroine who strides, at times with difficulty, through four centuries of English bourgeois and colonial history. In the process the dry theoretical problem of gendered narrative movement becomes an explicitly collective project of social critique – and above all, an exploration of a feminist utopian journey.

However, to extend the theoretical questions raised by de Lauretis and Doane, I follow *Orlando*'s awkward bumbling through historical

social and aesthetic vignettes into the imaginative imperialist encounter with the Khan of Khiva. In the final section of the essay, then, I look at Orlando's sojourn in colonial space as an instance which calls into question the binary logic of a gendered narrative/social allocation of movement and constraint. In the process, I begin to explore the implications of a seemingly self-evident feminist aspiration for access to the (white masculine) dream of unhindered mobility.

In 'Forms of time and chronotope in the novel', Mikhail Bakhtin describes the different articulations of time and space within historical literary genres as 'chronotopes':

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.³

Bakhtin describes a classical Greek form, the 'adventure novel of everyday life', which evokes the inner machinations of plot-time/space in *Orlando*. This form twins a biographical narrative of human identity, crisis and metamorphosis with an adventure structure chronicling a protagonist's 'actual course of travel' or journey. For Bakhtin, this chronotope combines the epic adventure time of the Greek romance with the everyday time of human biography: 'The factor of the journey itself, the *itinerary*, is an actual one: it imparts to the temporal sequence of the novel a real and essential organizing center. In such novels, finally, biography is the crucial organizing principle for time.'⁴ The adventure time (space) through which the literary and cinematic protagonist Orlando gambols wide-eyed follows a highly selective and ironic account of four hundred years of English aristocratic gender and social relations. The subtitle of Woolf's novel, 'a biography', indicates that *Orlando* was written as a *roman à clef* shadowing the life of Woolf's friend and lover Vita Sackville-West.⁵ To complicate further the structuring frame of biography, Woolf's (and Potter's) character Orlando may be read as a stand-in for, or a witness to, the historical experience of bourgeois English women. I will return below to this point.

Following the framework of the adventure novel of everyday life, Potter's adaptation of Woolf combines the characteristic forms of segmentation and passage. Intertitled signposts mark off a sequence of seven semi-autonomous episodes: '1600 DEATH'; '1610 LOVE'; '1650 POETRY'; '1700 POLITICS'; '1750 SOCIETY'; '1800 SEX'; and 'BIRTH' (not dated, but presumably Potter's present day, even as Woolf's novel ended in her time, 1928). Bold white capitals on a black screen, these intertitles effectively frame, foreground and

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of time and chronotope in the Novel', in M. Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵ See Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Introduction', in Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: a Biography* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. xi–xl.

methodically *interrupt* the film's narrative flow. The two elements (dates and events) within the titles signal the doubled spatial-temporal articulation of the adventure novel of everyday life. Crass episodal tags from death to (re)birth frame formative moments in Orlando's life according to traditional biographical developmental stages. Orlando's 'biographical' journey involves her/his passage through the clearly delineated historical episodes referenced by the dates. The protagonist, then, literally 'moves' through clearly differentiated tableaux, from the dotage of Elizabeth I (1600) to an ambassadorial appointment in the Orient (1700) and into the mid twentieth century. Orlando's passage through these stylized historical chronotopes links the film's narrative movement with an allegorical 'history' of British (bourgeois, white) womanhood.

I shall call these segments 'tableaux' or, better, 'movements': in reference to the composition of musical texts, each 'movement' carries its own colorations and mood. These movements offer a clue to the bare bones of *Orlando*'s narrative structure. Each episode encapsulates a particular aesthetic/historical space-time. Each movement presents a stylistically and narratively semi-autonomous segment. Visually, these tableaux are set apart by a distinct array of period costumes and decor which evoke and exaggerate the 'feel' of an era. Working with a particular room in the Great House, the Duchess's drawing room, or the stylized exteriors of the ice court, fragments of space metonymically reproduce a certain aesthetic/historical moment. In keeping with a theme of property-holding, Orlando's travels continually return to the family seat, the Great House itself. While the bold black and white flagstones of the Great Hall, the manor's exterior architecture, and the great oak tree in the field which bookends the film ('enduring old England') remain constant, particular rooms are redecorated (like Orlando/Tilda Swinton's changing garb) to signal historical shifts.

These historical moments are not produced, though, through the conventions of realism (even as applied within more traditional costume drama), but rather through the metonymic excess of elaborate set design and splendid overblown costume. The staged fantastical setting of each movement calls attention to the film's irreality. For example, the encounter with the Muscovites occurs not within a castle, but in the magical space of the ice court; Orlando's ambassadorial mission to Central Asia occurs within a grove of pillars, or out in the windblown desert. The excess of the costumes and ridiculousness of the infinite ritual and pomp offer a kind of ongoing visual satire of the historical conventions of bourgeois English manners, gender comportment and, less rigorously, empire. For example, consider the British ambassadorial contingent in Khiva at the onset of the battle, parading around in enormous hats with obscene plumage, skinny stocking legs and coyly, hugely buckled shoes. The pomposity of these wigs and costumes and the self-important mannerisms which



Fig. 1. All stills from *Orlando*
(Sally Potter, 1992)

accompany them offer a running visual commentary on the project of empire. The impracticality of the clothes, the attitudes and the disingenuous policies brought along in the huge spatial movement of colonialism highlight the polite ridiculousness (if not the tragedy) of the colonial venture. I will return to this point at greater length below.

In parallel (and perhaps more eloquently), the sheer crippling unmanageability of Orlando's bourgeois female attire speaks volumes to the 'structure of feeling' of upper-class British womanhood – the limits on physical and social mobility. The newly-corseted Orlando in her voluminous stiff white gown minces with difficulty around the dust-draped furniture in what had been her own parlour: the whiteness and volume of her skirt resemble the abandoned furniture which has been draped awaiting the return of the Lord of the Manor (fig. 1). Similarly, in the 'Society' parlour scene, Orlando is immobilized like one elaborate, frosted blue cake on a love seat. Complete with an unlikely sculpted headdress, she becomes a porcelain figurine, hampered equally by costume and convention from moving or responding to the routine snubs of the male 'wits'. The awkwardness of these overblown costumes is reinforced through a consistent use of perfectly orchestrated balanced visual compositions and long static shots which create a luscious stage on which to observe the actors going through their painstakingly choreographed, if meaningless, paces.

This self-conscious artifice of set and costume emphasizes a divergence from the conventions of realist period film – and a refusal of its implicit claim to represent a historically 'authentic' narrative space. On this subject, Sally Potter remarks: 'I always said to the design teams: this is not a costume drama, this is not a historical film, it's a film about now that happens to move through these periods.'

⁶ Penny Florence, 'A conversation with Sally Potter', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993), pp. 276–7.

⁷ *Orlando* borrows some of its lush layering of colour and texture and its theatrical, episodic structure from recent British avant-garde cinema. In fact, the film's production designers Ben Van Os and Jan Roelfs have worked extensively with Peter Greenaway, and Sandy Powell, veteran of Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*, provides a superlative array of costumes. Also, actress Tilda Swinton is featured prominently in Derek Jarman's films.

⁸ Stella Bruzzi, 'Tempestuous petticoats: costume and desire in *The Piano*', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 257–66.

⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The structural analysis of narratives', in S. Heath (ed.), *Image – Music – Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), pp. 17–34.

Research and find out all the things we can and then throw them away. We're going to stylize, we're going to leave out, exclude certain colours or textures or shapes. The usual approach to costume drama is in the genre of realism . . . But the premise of *Orlando* is that all history is imagined history and leaves out all the most important bits anyway.⁶

Such an approach relates to ironic reworkings of the genre in contemporary British cinema: *The Draughtsman's Contract* (Peter Greenaway, 1982) or *The Madness of King George* (Nicholas Hytner, 1994). British queer rewritings of history and costume drama (Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Edward II* (1991)⁷ or Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989)) offer a further aesthetic and political context for *Orlando*. Finally, Potter's project coincides interestingly with emergent feminist interest in costume drama, including Ulrike Ottinger's extravagant *oeuvre* (notably *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989)), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991).

In relation to my central preoccupation with gender and movement, the latter feminist films offer the most intriguing point of contact with *Orlando*. To a considerable degree, as my analysis points out, the ironic costume, gesture and character movement employed by Potter here highlight issues of gendered physical and social mobility and constraint. As Stella Bruzzi argues, *The Piano* presents another feminist treatment of costume which emphasizes historical, social and sexual constraint through clothing.⁸ By situating *Orlando* beside these other feminist costume dramas, an interesting range of cinematic expressions of femininity, movement, constraint – and indeed race and class – emerge. While such an analysis lies outside the scope of this essay, the above reading of costume and set in *Orlando* offers a point of departure from which to consider these questions in other feminist costume dramas.

Moving from this discussion of the screen spaces of segmentation, I would like now to delve into the more temporal problem of movement and passage. Roland Barthes's essay on the 'Structural analysis of narratives' offers precise terms for describing the movement, interruption, ellipsis, and expansion of narrative. For Barthes, the 'functional units' of narrative describe the actions and events which advance the plotline. He divides these units into the primary 'cardinal functions' and 'catalysers'. Cardinal functions correspond to the key plot points within narrative, while catalysers describe the secondary events which fill the space between the moments of risk or plot development. In Barthes's terms, 'cardinal functions are the risky moments of a narrative. Between these points of alternative, these "dispatchers", the catalysers, lay out areas of safety, rests, luxuries.'⁹

While this schema seems to lend itself most immediately to conventional narratives such as the Bond detective novels analysed by

Barthes, it applies also to a more leisurely, digressing structure such as that of *Orlando*. The cardinal functions – the critical episodes of risk, of ordeal traversed by the protagonist – correspond neatly to the intertitled episodes. The titles are shorthand for the significant action of each movement, from the death of Queen Elizabeth to Orlando's love for Sasha. In a sense, very little 'happens' in this film, as its events can be condensed into the string of intertitles. Within the genre of costume drama, the cardinal functions appear secondary to the real 'meat' of the story – the subtleties of gesture, a sidelong glance, the flick of a fan. As in costume drama generally, a great deal of the meaningfulness, the richness, of *Orlando* is conveyed through a micro-economy of polite silences, gestures and looks. Within this genre, these secondary actions do far more than 'embellish' the narrative events. As Barthes so perceptively points out, these catalysts are intrinsic to the 'economy of the message'. The 'dilatory sign', this 'apparently merely expletive notation always has a discursive function: it accelerates, delays, gives fresh impetus to the discourse, it summarizes, anticipates and sometimes even leads astray'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

The triumph of the dilatory sign in *Orlando* indicates a key quality of the text's narrative movement, its tempo. Potter creates a languorous, digressing and stately progression of perfectly choreographed tableaux: the splash of a red and gold tunic in a golden field as the long-legged Orlando sprawls under a tree. Here, the category of secondary plot points spills over into Barthes's second category of units, known as 'indices'. Indices relate to another descriptive level of narrative, having to do with character or setting. Cardinal functions form the narrative framework, which functions according to the logic of plot or story, while catalysts and indices serve as narrative *distortion* and *expansion*. The centrality afforded details of costume, setting and atmosphere in *Orlando*, as in other costume dramas, helps explain the pleasures of this slow-moving genre. A consistent use of long takes and meaningful stillnesses allow the leisure to enjoy the film's ample textures and colours, while the precise 'punch' of the film speaks through the pointed, sharp dialogue, and through Orlando's addresses and looks to the camera (fig. 2). For example, seemingly little 'happens' in the late twentieth-century sequence in which Orlando takes her manuscript to the publisher, who says to her:

This is really very good. Written from the heart. I think it will sell.
Provided you rewrite a little. You know, develop the love interest
and give it a happy ending.
By the way, how long did this draft take you . . .?

In response, Orlando merely looks quizzically into the camera. The pith of the moment, the richness of its irony speaks eloquently through Orlando's mute look. Perhaps the most singular stylistic device in the



Fig. 2

film, these carefully orchestrated looks and addresses to the camera reach outside of the diegetic action to create a moment of complicity with the audience. In a sense, the absurd constraints on bourgeois femininity so precisely recreated in the film's visual language prompt a leap to a different level of discourse for commentary. Swinton's quick looks and witty rejoinders brilliantly rupture the potential claustrophobia and preciousness resulting from a deliberately slow pacing.

Barthes points out that cardinal functions correspond to 'metonymic relata', while indices refer to 'metaphoric relata; the former correspond to a functionality of doing, the latter to a functionality of being'.¹¹ Clearly, this polarity of being and doing signals the question of the gendering of narrative and genre. While detective, Western or action genres (traditionally coded as 'masculine') privilege the metonymic plane of physical and spectacular *doing*, of action and decision, the more 'feminine' melodrama or costume drama genres lean more heavily towards the metaphorical level of *being* – a micro-economy of gesture, and a rich audiovisual array of colour, harmony, pattern, texture, rhythm and melody. In 'Entertainment and Utopia', Richard Dyer calls these elements 'non-representational signs' which may be treated as a mere function of narrative, but which operate at a level of 'feeling' or 'sensibility', rather than of linear plot progression.¹² And even though these non-representational signs may call attention to themselves within female-coded genres (Dyer focuses on the musical), they certainly form an integral part of the semiotic system of all genres.

Of course, as Dyer reminds us, generic conventions and the 'structure of feeling' they evoke correspond to very real systems of marketing and social relations. Mary Ann Doane points out that the gendering of genre articulates the former category of traditionally 'male' genres precisely with the level of action, of doing – a linear and energetic narrative 'drive' traversing topographies of open space, possibility, agency, movement.¹³ 'Female' genres such as the melodrama, on the other hand, tend to function at a more subtle, immobile level, incorporating (for Doane) claustrophobic, cluttered internal spaces, and a corresponding stifling, hysterically immobilized temporality.

On one level, then, *Orlando*'s chosen genre of the costume drama, with its attention to setting, costume and subtle conventions of look and gesture, draws heavily on such 'female'-coded generic conventions rather than on the muscular striding of a protagonist through space and time, as suggested by the quintessential male genres. Even so, the audacity of *Orlando*'s journey through four hundred years of British history links the adventure to motion, transformation, change on the heroic scale of *Gulliver's Travels*, or *Around the World in Eighty Days*. If this generic tension between the gendered economies of being and doing holds, how

¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹² See Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 271–83.

¹³ Doane, 'The moving image: pathos and the maternal'.

then can we describe the attenuated narrative movement of *Orlando*?

Thus far I have described a plot structure which follows a dilatory, languorous pattern of sequential segments of (in)action. Each segment sketches out a perfectly orchestrated, self-contained little world of set, costume and micronarrative. These 'movements' are strung together by the physical presence, if not the forceful subjectivity, of Orlando in her/his passage *through*, destination unknown.

For Bakhtin, the 'journey' provides a stock narrative code which corresponds to the movement of the character through time and space. The metaphor of narrative as journey is an old one: but more than a mere artistic trope, the journey has been described as the structuring code of narrative. Teresa de Lauretis follows from Greimas to suggest that 'the semantic structure of all narrative is the movement of an actant-subject toward an actant-object'.¹⁴ De Lauretis writes that the movement of narrative 'seems to be that of a passage, a transformation predicated on the figure of a hero, a mythical subject'.¹⁵ Yet as she points out, this journey, the seeming substance of all manner of narrative from folkloric tales to Sophocles's (and Freud's) tale of Oedipus, does not spring spontaneously, ahistorically and neutrally from Zeus's brow, but carries traces of the places and times through which it travels. In short, the narrative journey is historical, culturally specific, and, perhaps most importantly, gendered. De Lauretis contends, then, that 'the work of narrative . . . is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text; and hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning fiction and history represented by the literary-artistic tradition and all the texts of culture'.¹⁶

For de Lauretis this structuralist binary coding of differences functions according to a gendered economy of stasis and movement. Here she cites Lotman who describes two fundamental character types: 'those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with regard to plot-space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topological feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space'.¹⁷ Following this binary division of narrative freedoms, it becomes immediately evident who must be the adventuring protagonist – and who stays home to mend socks. For de Lauretis, this binarism of mobile/immobile positions within narrative describes perhaps

the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage; and if passage may be in either direction, from inside to outside or vice versa, from life to death or vice versa, nonetheless all these terms are predicated on the *single* figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing the hero, the

¹⁴ De Lauretis, 'Desire in narrative', p. 112.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a *topos*, a resistance, matrix and matter.¹⁸

'Immobile' (female) characters are seen to exist solely as functions of male becoming, providing landmarks and diversions in the all-important, hopelessly self-involved journey of Our Hero. Yet when we look at *Orlando*, the binary gendering of movement and agency within the narrative becomes problematic. Orlando becomes, almost in spite of her/himself, *mobile*, as she/he moves through different historical circumstances. But hers/his is a fickle quality of agency, reliant on the whims of chance.

The film's narrative eschews the conventional motors of character motivation, or a subtly orchestrated sequence of conflicts (dilemma, action, reaction), in favour of a progress according to what Bakhtin calls 'the logic of chance': 'This logic is one of *random contingency*, which is to say chance *simultaneity* [meetings] and *chance rupture* [nonmeetings], that is, a logic of random *disjunctions* in time as well.'¹⁹ *Orlando*'s plot moves do not work through the psychological, progressive logic of character development, but rather, sails on the fickle winds of circumstance. Orlando's acquisition of immortality, for example, springs from his chance meeting with Queen Elizabeth who upon her deathbed simply wills away the ruins of time. In the film's second movement, Our Hero chances to meet Sasha, daughter of the Muscovite ambassador, amidst the pomp of the magical ice-court, and courts her only for the time granted by the insubstantial ice the revellers skim over so beautifully. Waiting under the bridge for Sasha to steal away with him forever, Orlando is once again subject to chance as the rain breaks up the ice, allowing the Muscovite ship to set sail. Similarly, after Orlando's encounter with Shelmerdine, her lover's departure is signalled by a change in the wind.

Intriguingly, Orlando's biographical journey does not entirely correspond to the 'adventure novel of everyday life' in which the hero must weather crisis and emerge transformed, a better (or worse) version of himself. Rather, Orlando proves a uniquely melancholic and lethargic hero who, within each plot movement and within the film as a whole, fails most of the trials of manliness (or womanliness). In this way, the closure of conventional narrative convention is constantly denied: Orlando does not get his girl; he proves a self-indulgent and mediocre 'dabbling' poet; faced with the enemies at the gate of Khiva, Orlando fails the test of manly valour and flees the site of battle; when she meets Shelmerdine, Orlando lets him go again and foregoes marriage (and the possibility of keeping her land); when she gives birth, she bears not a son, who would allow her to keep her beloved property, but a daughter.

This constant frustration within the micronarrative of each

movement forms a recursive structure which defies conventional narrative closure – both the classic heterosexual closure of marriage, or the capitalist drive towards regaining what was owned and lost, Orlando's property. Orlando's biographical journey transpires very slowly, as she/he lingers in lengthy melancholic adolescence for some 350 years before becoming a young woman. Digressing from the centrality of metamorphosis in Bakhtin's biographical passage, the drama and significance of this transformation is played down.

According to Rachel Blau DuPlessis's analysis of Woolf's *Orlando*, 'Orlando's perpetual youth – at any rate, her astonishingly slow rate of growth – seems to challenge Freud's idea of the progress of the psyche from bisexual dramas to heterosexual object choice.²⁰ In the novel, the affirmation of androgyny and homosexual desire undercuts the Freudian development model of female sexuality current in the 1920s. The newly-female Orlando finds in Shelmerdine a mate who is very womanly, played by a sensual and 'feminine' Billy Zane resplendent with long flowing locks and sensuous lips. Through moments like this, and especially through Swinton's self-conscious performance of Orlando's man-becoming-woman, Potter's film toys incessantly with the arbitrariness of gender.

The uncertain status of gender in *Orlando* is echoed in a hesitancy at the level of action. As Orlando never entirely rids herself/himself of gender ambiguity, she/he never achieves full status as a mobile adventurer. As a woman, she experiences at a stroke the constraints levied against bourgeois females through law, apparel and social codes of conduct. For example, in the 'Society' movement, when ambassador Orlando awakes to find himself a her, she is unceremoniously bundled off home on the back of a camel, only to discover upon arrival that she must now marry or lose her property. As many gendered conventions of narrative closure (romance, heroism, property) fall by the wayside, the outcome becomes indeterminate. The hero as androgyne is no longer guaranteed to get 'his' girl; while the girl might unexpectedly sprout a penis and set out on an adventure of 'her' own.

Such a reading of gendered movement in *Orlando* must be informed by the understanding that Woolf and Potter are on some level explicitly out to usurp such conventions. Even as critics commonly identify *Orlando* as a 'crossdressing' film (in reference to the concurrent sensation *The Crying Game* [Neil Jordan, 1993]), Potter explicitly underplays the significance of gender. Upon realizing her change of sex, Orlando comments drily to the camera: 'Same person. No difference at all. Just a different sex.' In this vein, Orlando moves through the film virtually unchanged. What transformation occurs does not change the 'essence' of Orlando/Tilda Swinton, but registers at the level of costume and hairstyle, or, in the case of the sex change, is etched on the body surface. On some level, Potter's Orlando speaks always through Tilda Swinton's singular *female* performance. Woolf

²⁰ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 64.

and Potter remind us that gender is superficial and matters not a whit. At the same time, however, the film's irony arises from its constant demonstration that gender is made to matter very, very much through absurd social convention. In this vein it is absolutely pivotal that Orlando is played by a woman, not a man. Orlando's enigmatic address to the camera must be absolutely female, and feminist.

Through a bravura performance, and through her addresses and looks to the camera, Orlando/Swinton periodically punctures the film's diegetic action. In the process, she achieves a certain immunity to the perils of either position as she/he journeys more as witness than active participant. Through her looks and addresses to the camera, Swinton's Orlando usurps and comments upon the constraints of narrative and social codes. Much of the pleasure of *Orlando* for a feminist audience arises from these juxtapositions of narrative situation and commentary and from the simultaneous dramatization and unbinding of gendered constraints of bourgeois history. In the next section, I will return to Bakhtin's chronotope to link *Orlando*'s textual world to the social space of international feminist audiences which forms one context in which the film circulates.

Tracing the transposition of Woolf's *Orlando* into another medium and another historical era, the chronotopic model insists on the specificity of each textual and social time-space, and on the dynamic relation between the living, breathing text and 'the completely real-life time-space where the work resonates'.²¹ Bakhtin's dialogism sketches a porous membrane between text and specific historical-social formations. Orlando's 'look', then, provides the chronotopic doorway, if you like, between the textual chronotope (the intricacies of plot structure, character and 'narrative movement' through textual space-time as described in the first half of the present essay) and the meaning-making process undertaken by situated historical subjects. Swinton's looks and addresses construct a bridge, a link of sensibility, offering a humorous phatic contact which continually invites the spectator back into Orlando's journey.²² Thus beckoning, the in-joke speaks with a particular inflection through the codes of a particular feminist tradition. By evoking Woolf's iconic feminist text and authorial voice, *Orlando* speaks to and from the dispersed and varied contexts of (western, English-speaking) feminism. (Of course, this is not the only audience for the film, but I am reading the film here in terms of a privileged and pointed address to a 'model reader'.) Woolf and Potter respectively harness the collective, utopic and transformative power of narrative movement, specifically the trope of an allegorical biographical journey. Hardly disturbing the times through which she travels, Orlando bears witness to the absurdity of these quasihistorical tableaux, pausing periodically to 'report back' to the 1990s audience. Swinton's Orlando becomes a time-travelling

²¹ Bakhtin, 'Forms of time and chronotope in the novel', p. 252.

²² In the introduction to the published script of *Orlando*, Sally Potter notes how she and Swinton settled on the device of these looks and addresses to the camera 'to convert Virginia Woolf's literary wit into a cinematic humour . . . I hoped that this direct address would create a golden thread that would connect the [1990s] audience . . . with Orlando.' See Sally Potter, 'Introduction', in *Orlando* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. xiii.

feminist observer – and ultimately a protagonist journeying towards herself, towards artistic creation.

Throughout her adventures, the cinematic Orlando retains a certain blank quality, the hard smooth surface of impressionable youth, where her full subjectivity as protagonist should be recorded. Further, she remains to some audiences Tilda (a British avant-garde theatre and film persona), while her witty asides carry an implicit homage to Woolf. The address and the adventure straddle the ‘once upon a time’ inflection of fabled mythical subject and a more complex collective project of feminist movement, where Orlando offers a quizzical screen onto which the audience can project a utopic feminist fable of becoming. For Duplessis,

[Woolf’s] *Orlando* is at least a parodic biography, a female history of Britain, a feminist apologue – an insouciant break with conventional norms surrounding gender, sexual identity, and narrative. In this work, the Ages of England have become the Ages of Woman, scrutinized with two questions in mind: whether the protagonist can undertake work and whether she can enjoy love. Until the present, these satisfactions are divided, and love is separated from quest.²³

²³ DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p. 61.

Potter’s changes to key aspects of Woolf’s plotline (especially its resolutions) offer clues to the 1990s feminist exigencies which inform her adaptation. Woolf’s novel, a wish-fulfilling spoof biography of Vita Sackville-West, ends with green lights on all counts: in love, in the work of writing, and in the restoration of the lost property to its rightful owner. Transposed into the terms of contemporary feminism, Potter’s film also ends on a hopeful note, but dispenses with the romantic closure of married life with Shelmerdine, gives up the bourgeois privilege of property, and trades a daughter for the son. The symbolic achievement of artistic self-expression, the birthright of a new generation of daughters, becomes the key focus of resolution and utopic future vision. The film closes in the field under the oak tree where it began with the unbearded youth trying to write poetry. Only now, in the present, Orlando stares coolly into the camera in a final lingering closeup, as her daughter plays with a camcorder (a none-too-subtle symbol of feminist self-representation). A cherubic Jimmy Somerville floats somewhere above. The field, the oak tree and Somerville’s otherworldly angel falsetto bookend the film, enclosing it in the pleasing wrapper of ‘once upon a time’ and ‘happily ever after’.

Looping back to the earlier discussion of narrative movement, then, through the looks to the camera the audience shares the pithy pauses, the ridiculous uncertainties, of Orlando’s progress through the ages. After all of Orlando’s masculine bumbling lassitude, it is only in the present day, as a woman in the late twentieth century, that she finds artistic (and presumably in the process, social) recognition. In keeping

with the film's curious tempo of attenuated dynamism, *Orlando* ends where it began. After all of her wardrobe changes Orlando remains essentially the same, only as the final voice-over attests: 'she is no longer trapped by destiny'. Ultimately, Potter stakes the allegorical project of feminist becoming almost entirely on the feminist tradition of critical high art, a bourgeois tradition exemplified by Woolf and continued in Potter and Swinton. Orlando's 'arrival' is a return to the English oak tree, an evocation of interconnected generations of feminist artistic creators. A field of their own, perhaps?

Now, in this quest for the 'movement' within *Orlando*'s narrative structure, we hit a snag. What I have described so far indicates stasis or, at best, pleasurable (spatiotemporal) lingering, or temporal digression at the core of the film's structure. Transposing Orlando's journey onto this structure, I had hoped to arrive at a semblance of dynamism which seems necessary to a feminist journey of becoming. But if I were to report this dynamism, with Orlando/Swinton/Woolf/Potter voyaging purposefully through the centuries setting things right, I would be manipulating the text to my own ends.

Rather, we find ourselves at a kind of rest station, stuck in what Margaret Morse describes as a 'paradoxical feeling of stasis and motion'.²⁴ What I am constantly craving, what was so splendid and rare about, say, *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), or even *The River Wild* (Curtis Hanson, 1994), was the female embodiment-in-journey: the subversive act of what Kirsten Marthe Lenz calls 'changing the script' – hijacking that muscular male drive, and somehow making it our own, a female journey of metamorphosis, and, ultimately, we hope, arrival somewhere *better*,²⁵ where we find ourselves miraculously 'transformed' (Bakhtin's term) into something less damaged, more dynamic. But this is not the flavour of pleasure offered by *Orlando*. Potter and Woolf present a more subtle project of critique – a kind of attenuated 'doing' or extended, aesthetically vibrant, 'being'.

In the above detailed analysis of gendered movement, Orlando's curious lassitude seems to spring from her/his indeterminate gender. But after all that, I am left wondering about the completeness of this binary argument about gendered stasis and motion. Reconsidering the film, widening my perspective, I think I have missed something. As is so often the case, where de Lauretis's argument illuminates some patterns in narrative, it obscures others. In brief, as *Orlando* speaks so eloquently to a particular English bourgeois experience of gender, I have overlooked other dynamics of stasis and movement operative within the text. In fact, in one interview,²⁶ in the midst of a long and detailed discussion of feminism, Sally Potter cites colonialism as the subtext of *Orlando*. But how does the profound historical and geographical movement of imperialism complicate the genesis and impetus of Orlando's utopian feminist journey?

²⁴ See Margaret Morse, 'An ontology of everyday distraction: the freeway, the mall, and television', in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *The Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 193–221.

²⁵ See Kirsten Marthe Lenz, 'The popular pleasures of female revenge (or rage bursting in a blaze of gunfire)', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1993), pp. 371–405.

²⁶ Florence, 'A conversation with Sally Potter', p. 284.

²⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. 63.

²⁸ Woolf, *Orlando: a Biography*, p. 82.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said writes of the imperialist ethos, 'a structure of attitude and reference' which strongly informs the spatial imaginary of the English novel. Not concerned only with works set explicitly in the colonies, Said describes the constitutive outside provided by empire even in novels set in England. 'As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction.'²⁷ In this literature, young English men are commonly sent off to sow their wild oats in the constantly available, lucrative and exotic playground of 'the colonies'. Along these lines, Woolf's *Orlando* voyages to Turkey to escape a persistent suitor, and the author wryly describes: 'He did what any other young man would have done in his place, and asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople'.²⁸ *Orlando* the novel adds a layer of satirical commentary to the trope of colonial adventure, an engagement taken up by Potter in the cinematic language of 1990s arthouse cinema.

The gentle irony of *Orlando*'s self-indulgent sojourn in Khiva (shot in Khiva, Uzbekistan) emerges perhaps most directly in the stock trope of the adventure novel, the 'encounter' with the Other. In Potter's *Orlando* the initial encounter with the Khan of Khiva cuts directly to the quick of the matter:

Khan: Why are you here?

Orlando: I am here as a representative of His Majesty's government. . .

Khan: Yes. It has been said to me that the English make a habit of collecting . . . countries.

This scene, as well as the following one where the Khan exchanges toasts with *Orlando* under the blistering sun, offer a brilliant sendup of the ceremonious imperial encounter. Surely the casting of Québécois actor Lothaire Bluteau as 'Khan' of a generic Orientalist kingdom can be no coincidence here. Potter slyly brings the breadth and arbitrariness of British imperialism into relief here, as one colonial subject is made, tongue in cheek, to stand in for another.

Visually, these encounters are composed of perfectly symmetrical balanced shots which play up the formality of imperial exchange against the exaggerated quality of the costumes and the explicit irony of the dialogue. The Khan, for example, is resplendent in a blue 'eastern' outfit, flanked by his twin turbanned lieutenants and columns aligned perfectly behind. This shot corresponds to an equally formal *Orlando* with his enormous (hot) white flowing wig, backed up by his effeminate soldiers (figs 3 and 4). The absolute theatricality of these matched shots, the stasis of both camera (long still shots) and actors (constant formal choreographing of purposefully pointless marching) concisely satirises the imperial encounter with strategies similar to



Figs 3 and 4



Fig. 5.



those Potter employs elsewhere to address gender. Yet there is an uncomfortable edge to this ironic take on colonialism.

I would suggest that part of the narrative uncertainty of *Orlando* (particularly in the 'Politics' movement) springs not only from indeterminate gender but also from a certain 'stuckness' which extends beyond feminism into bourgeois imperialist history proper: How now are westerners to represent critically the project of empire? What exactly are/were Orlando (and through him our collective historical imaginations) doing in Khiva? According to Woolf, 'We can only testify that Orlando was kept busy, what with his wax and seals, his various coloured ribbons which had to be diversely attached, his engrossing of titles and making of flourishes round capital letters, till luncheon came – a splendid meal of perhaps thirty courses'.²⁹ In cinematic language, Potter also focuses on empty ceremonious detail and luxury. She visualizes the lassitude and general uselessness of what Woolf calls Orlando's 'career' in the constant parading of the Ambassador and his henchmen through the dusty streets of the walled city. Then, after a time in his new post, Ambassador Orlando is pictured posed in rapturous meditation beside a 'Turkish' bath wrapped in a middle-eastern shift, his hair up in a towel (fig. 5). Apparently our Orlando has 'gone native'. In his polite, well-meaning way, Orlando fulfils all the clichés of westerners who 'discover' themselves in the Orient.

In imperialist literature, the encounter often facilitates some deeper knowledge of self. The Other, like the female term in de Lauretis's equation, marks a threshold for the protagonist's passage. Even as we find Orlando in Khiva ultimately, narcissistically, alone (suggesting that a rendezvous with self seems the logical fruition of the colonial

²⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

encounter), such a critique can only be about Englishness. (The delightful scene with the Muscovites offers another superb vignette on English attitudes to ‘foreigners’.) As in E.M. Forster’s soulsearching tales of colonial relations, the window into another world ultimately only brings Orlando back to her ‘true’ (female) self.

Personal and political crisis strikes for Orlando only when the Khan’s enemies are at the city gates, and the English guests are called upon to prove their mettle. Significantly, the incomprehensible battle raging between heathen forces offers the backdrop and the catalyst to Orlando’s gender transformation. At this key juncture in the film, the site of narrative critique shifts from the awkwardness of the colonial encounter back to issues of gender, and Orlando is abruptly transported back to ‘Society’. Crisis of empire becomes crisis in masculinity, a timely disengagement from distasteful matters of statesmanship and empire. Woolf’s point, of course, is that British women have historically been excluded from ‘the public life of Orlando’s country’. In Potter’s contemporary adaptation, the contested quality of imperial space presents a limit, a vanishing point for a critical feminist costume drama. Perhaps feminist costume drama can most powerfully and precisely address a particular white, bourgeois experience of English femininity. More generally, perhaps the polite, understated mannered form of this genre, conceived in European bourgeois social experience, does not translate well to address the savagery of bloody colonial conflict?

Finally, I sense an aesthetic limit to the critical possibilities of a certain quality of European art cinema, particularly (though not exclusively) in relation to colonialism. While *Orlando* springs from and continually returns to the preoccupations of English history and landscape, in the ‘Love’ and ‘Politics’ movements Potter digresses into the ‘foreign’ landscapes of St Petersburg and Uzbekistan respectively. To a certain degree, like other European arthouse coproductions, *Orlando* relies for its appeal on an absolutely lush quality of set and costume – and on the spectacle of historically or culturally ‘other’ landscapes, costumes, peoples and customs. Potter draws from this contemporary cultural repertoire of international image–space, even as she inserts moments of incisive self-critique of English xenophobia. For both book and film, the conceptual sweep of a bumbling feminist journey through vast tracts of space and time provides part of the delight, the *élan*, the sense of movement and possibility of the project. These exotic backdrops may provide one element of de Lauretis’s ‘plot-space, a *topos*, a resistance, matrix and matter’ to mark the passage of the feminist adventurer. And while Potter is cognizant of many of the contradictions of this backdrop, I find that other feminist projects such as *The Piano* and *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*³⁰ share in a generalizable neocolonial tendency of other arthouse (not to mention Hollywood) films, from *City of Joy* (Roland Joffé, 1992) to *Indochine* (Regis Wargnier, 1993). These films,

³⁰ See Linda Dyson, ‘The return of the repressed? Whiteness, femininity and colonialism in *The Piano*’, *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 267–76. For an insightful discussion of the complex relations of East and West in *Jeanne d’Arc of Mongolia*, see Julia Knight, ‘Observing rituals: Ulrike Ottinger’s *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*’ (paper presented at the *Screen* conference, June 1996).

whatever their political inflections (which of course require careful attention in and of themselves), continue to perpetuate and refurbish cinematically Said's 'structure of [imperialist] attitude and reference'.

Placed alongside the broader cultural plundering of neocolonial space, the voyages taken by feminist costume drama in search of self and narrative agency may be considered in a new light. Ultimately I am not interested in assigning blame here, but rather in interrogating and extending feminist work around movement and constraint in narrative. I believe that the question of colonial movement, as well as other key issues around race and class mobility and constraint, must inform a feminist reading of these issues. Further, as Richard Dyer's work on the racial inflections of cinematic space suggests, these meditations on the social renderings of cultural/textual space and time can provide a productive perspective on a range of overlapping accounts of identity and representation.³¹

³¹ See Richard Dyer's forthcoming book *Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Through a close reading of Sally Potter's film, *Orlando*, this essay has explored an intuitive link between narrative and imaginative movement, and the sociohistorical feminist desires for agency and transformation (specifically the utopian drive of feminist journeying as expressed in cultural texts). By juxtaposing a consideration of how colonialism facilitates and undercuts these feminist aspirations to geographical and imaginative mobility, I come to reconsider the implications of a certain quality of desired 'feminist movement'. In detailing the precise qualities of narrative and imaginative movement in *Orlando*, I have suggested productive avenues of inquiry which may be extended to other costume dramas. More generally, I have sketched out a rich area of inquiry which speaks to, but is no means limited to, feminist costume drama or arthouse cinema – an area of inquiry which addresses the particular gendered qualities of movement in cinematic texts.

I would like to thank José Arroyo, Richard Dyer and Kim Sawchuk for their kind commentaries on this project.

1 Teresa de Lauretis, 'Desire in narrative', in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 103–57.

Film studies in South Africa

In South Africa film studies is not a singular discipline nor will it become so, at least in the foreseeable future. The primary reason for this is that increasingly film has been elided by television. At the end of 1995 the Independent Broadcasting Authority, an independent statutory body established in the runup to the first democratic elections held in 1994, decreed that the national public broadcaster would have to increase its local content to fifty per cent by 1998. At that time local content in documentary was a mere 3.5 per cent while in drama it was 9.2 per cent. Presently the quest to establish and represent the new South African nation and its multiple identities in the eleven official languages is primary. This propels South African filmmakers into a new and rare opportunity to provide material for national television audiences. The implications for university departments of this burgeoning democratic media process cannot be ignored. Increasingly students, mindful of the high rate of unemployment, demand courses that will equip them to enter the broadcasting job market.

The pace with which broadcasting is developing needs to be reviewed against the inability of the government to move speedily on establishing new film policy. The time gap between the demise of apartheid policies on film, especially on government subsidies, and a new film policy to reshape the growth of film *per se* within the ambit of the new democracy has been too long. The now-promulgated Film Bill, probably to be approved by Parliament, proposes the establishing of a National Film and Video Foundation. Its functions focus on the creation, development and promotion of the film and video industry, and include dispensing funds for these purposes. Once more film and video overlap and any divide is not clear. This entrenches the sense that film

and video – film and television – cannot be separated. Whether or not they should be at this juncture in global communications, and in South African media development, is a broader question which cannot be answered easily. The important point for film studies is that its status as a unique field of study in South Africa is not viable.

Against this backdrop it is, however, still possible to draw a map of film studies in South Africa. There are no Film Studies departments at any of the universities, but film studies is incorporated to greater or lesser degrees in various curricula. The most established and comprehensive of these are: the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, where film studies has been incorporated into the curriculum of the School of Dramatic Art at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; Rhodes University, where film studies forms part of the curriculum of the Department of Media Studies and Journalism; and the University of Natal, Durban, where film courses are taught within the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies and in the Department of Drama and Performance Studies. Apart from these three institutions, film studies is incorporated as a small part of studies in English and other language departments or within the ambit of Communications courses. But there is no other university-based film studies programme which has as a unique focus, albeit a small one, the study of cinema.

Where film is offered for study, courses range across topics that include narrative cinema, feminist cinema, Third World cinema and African cinema. The focus on African cinema has become extremely significant in the new democracy. Not only are more filmmakers from other parts of the continent visiting South Africa, but South Africa is becoming more integrated into the continent since the death of apartheid. In addition, the changing demography of students in tertiary institutions, especially those that were previously more white than black, has demanded the reassessment of curricula. This

reassessment has been another of the special opportunities that the new democracy has manifested, especially since the education system has been transformed at all levels.

Another way of assessing film studies in South Africa is in terms of research and publication output. There have been very few books published on South African cinema. Two stand out as most significant: Thelma Gutsche's *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895–1940*, which was published in 1972; and Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, published in 1989. A third book edited by J. Blignaut and M. Botha and published in 1992, called *Movies – Moguls – Mavericks: South African Cinema 1989–1991*, which documents some of the developments in anti-apartheid cinema, is also important. The *Critical Arts* journal published by the University of Natal, Durban, consistently includes papers on film and devotes whole issues to film topics, such as the recent issue on African cinema. Other academic journals such as *Pretexts* and the *South African Theatre Journal* publish intermittently on cinema.

The creation of images that represent ourselves by ourselves and the quest to frame the nation beyond apartheid, coupled with the policies of the new government on broadcasting and film, will promote the making of new television products. Education needs to be geared towards supporting these manifestations of transformation from an apartheid state to a new democracy. It also needs to act as a critical reminder of those elements of culture that continue to require study. Within this new and challenging scenario the status of Film Studies in South Africa urgently needs reassessment if it is to play an active role in the future of image making and viewing.

With grateful acknowledgement to Jo-Ann Monson for her research assistance.

Jacqueline Maingard

Remapping: another look at cinema studies in Sweden

The report 'Film studies in Sweden: cinema arts and back again?', written by two doctoral students from the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at Stockholm University, Göran Bolin and Michael Forsman (hereafter B/F), in *Screen*, volume 37, number 3 (1996) maps a disciplinary landscape difficult to recognize for a native in the field. The Swedish situation is, in my perhaps biased opinion, neither as bleak nor as monolithic as the impression conveyed in the report. So let us view the scene of the crime from another vantage point.

Of course, small language communities can experience problems, if not a barrier (as our colleagues claim), with being fully integrated in the international research community. Blurred boundaries generally have to be faced by scholars whose first language is not English. It is a difficult balance to strike, hard to choose whether to write in a language where one, at best, can display a full-blown style but only be read locally, or to dabble in a pale version of English without the cornucopia of rhetorical options or colloquialisms accessible to native writers. Had, for instance, Rune Waldekranz's book, *Så föddes filmen* (*The Birth of the Film Medium*, 1976), been published in English, it would have become a standard citation in research on melodrama and early cinema. Had his whole *oeuvre* been translated into English he would no doubt have received the same prestigious Jean Mitry Award in Pordenone as Mitry himself, Jerzy Toeplitz, and the whole first generation of film historians. Today, Rune Waldekranz is almost unknown outside Sweden.

There are, however, many ways of disseminating research and national scholarly activities. Some of us have long been part of the conference circuit, our careers interspersed with appointments as visiting scholars or professors at international universities. Like myself, several of my colleagues – Erik

reassessment has been another of the special opportunities that the new democracy has manifested, especially since the education system has been transformed at all levels.

Another way of assessing film studies in South Africa is in terms of research and publication output. There have been very few books published on South African cinema. Two stand out as most significant: Thelma Gutsche's *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895–1940*, which was published in 1972; and Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film*, published in 1989. A third book edited by J. Blignaut and M. Botha and published in 1992, called *Movies – Moguls – Mavericks: South African Cinema 1989–1991*, which documents some of the developments in anti-apartheid cinema, is also important. The *Critical Arts* journal published by the University of Natal, Durban, consistently includes papers on film and devotes whole issues to film topics, such as the recent issue on African cinema. Other academic journals such as *Pretexts* and the *South African Theatre Journal* publish intermittently on cinema.

The creation of images that represent ourselves by ourselves and the quest to frame the nation beyond apartheid, coupled with the policies of the new government on broadcasting and film, will promote the making of new television products. Education needs to be geared towards supporting these manifestations of transformation from an apartheid state to a new democracy. It also needs to act as a critical reminder of those elements of culture that continue to require study. Within this new and challenging scenario the status of Film Studies in South Africa urgently needs reassessment if it is to play an active role in the future of image making and viewing.

With grateful acknowledgement to Jo-Ann Monson for her research assistance.

Jacqueline Maingard

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Hedling, Maaret Koskinen and Tytti Soila – have taught at US universities. The fact that I am writing this from the University of Southern California, where I am presently visiting professor, is a case in point.

In terms of publication there are a couple more articles published internationally by Swedish scholars than the few mentioned in the report, but I will refrain from bothering *Screen* readers with an update of my own CV or those of my colleagues. Let me mention in passing, however, some recent and forthcoming attractions: Maaret Koskinen has just published a survey of contemporary Swedish Cinema in English (edited by the Italian scholar Francesco Boni), and Routledge will soon publish Astrid Söderbergh Widding's, Tytti Soila's and Gunnar Iversen's historical account of Scandinavian cinema. And Erik Hedling's book on Lindsay Anderson's career will be published by Cassell later this year.

If the Department of Cinema Studies in Stockholm were not part of the international scholarly community, we would not attract overseas scholars to teach courses there, nor would we publish original material in our new quarterly film studies journal *Aura* (three issues in Swedish and one in English per year). And our conferences would not merit scholarly attention from abroad. Yet we organized two international conferences at our department in 1996: one on interactive multimedia and one on nonfiction cinema. And we have recently established a Socrates network for student and teacher exchange.

120 students out of almost two thousand applicants are accepted onto our undergraduate programme each semester – students from all over Sweden, and quite a few from the other Nordic countries. Of our three latest doctoral dissertations, one was published in Swedish, one in Norwegian and one in English. All in all there are around 350 students enrolled in the four semesters of undergraduate studies.

The legal framework for appointment in the Swedish academic system requires a doctoral

degree for lecturers, which is the dominant teaching category at Swedish universities. Such positions are, however, purely teaching posts and in the main without research opportunities, unless the lecturer is awarded a grant from a research council or within the university. As is mentioned in the *Screen* report, I have been Professor at the Department of Cinema Studies since 1993; within the same Faculty of Humanities as B/F's media and communication department. When I came to Stockholm, lecturers with a doctoral degree were in a minority at the department; the heyday of media and television activities reported by B/F had generated neither books nor dissertations, nor even a visible legacy. Three years later all our lecturers have doctoral degrees, and I am pleased to announce that two or three new doctoral students will complete their dissertation each year. This means that B/F's worries about the expansion of cinema – or film – studies at the smaller colleges are unfounded. And the programme at Lund University, of which I was once a part, still works very well, due mainly to the fact that it is headed by professional scholars. Looking ahead a few years, such a dissemination of expertise will ensure a plurality of approaches to cinema studies.

Candidates will no doubt be available for upcoming positions if the colleges can offer attractive scholarly environments and access to films, technology and library facilities. The main impediment is access to film, television and video material outside the archives in Stockholm. The local colleges and the universities outside Stockholm need, in my opinion, to reach an agreement with the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and the other national archives. The British Film Institute is a model in this respect. Copyright laws unfortunately prevent material from the Archive for Recorded Sound and Moving Images (ALB) from being used for educational purposes, the deposit copies being available exclusively for research. I am

a member of the ALB Board, and a delegation, including the head of the media department, has recently approached the ministry about this matter. The main problem for the colleges, beside the present lack of formally qualified teachers, is the role the Swedish Film Institute has adopted with regard to higher education.

The report compares the SFI and the BFI in terms of publishing. Regrettably I must contradict B/F: the publishing policies in London and Stockholm could not be more different. Scholars play no part at all in the SFI's operations, and apart from the important filmographical account, and the journal *Chaplin*, nothing is published. This is why our department edits a book series together with a commercial publisher: there are two titles so far, one being Örjan Roth-Lindberg's dissertation mentioned by B/F. We have also recently published an anthology on film and historiography (edited by Astrid Söderbergh Widding) within the expanded *Aura* undertaking. Apart from the periodical, we will continue to publish books, with the next title devoted to feminist film studies (edited by Tytti Soila). The BFI has occupied a cutting-edge position in terms of publishing for a long time, and over the years has promoted numerous educational activities and generously made material available to universities outside London and to scholars at the study centre. Even our own screenings now and then benefit from the NFTVA's holdings. Such promotion of the field is unheard of in Stockholm, and I have consequently done most of my research at international film archives. The SFI does not even have a study centre: scholars have to buy screening time at market prices. The SFI policy accounts for a lot of non-scholarly activities in the past. Our department has now, thanks to research council money, set up its own fully equipped study centre, and negotiated an agreement with the SFI to access archival material. For undergraduate screenings we still pay market prices. All our

courses are based on 35mm screenings of films.

The conviction that the local colleges will be able to benefit from doctorates from our department is the rationale behind the government's recent decision to allocate money for a second professorship to our department. In my proposal I suggested that it should be used as a visiting position for three years of two to three month slots, which would enliven our programme with an inspiring variety of expertise. Another reason for wanting to delay the appointment has to do with the current faculty situation, with a whole generation of lecturers now trying to reach the next formal competence level, the docent title, which is more difficult to obtain than Reader status in Britain. One must normally have at least a second book-length study in addition to a dissertation to receive the title of docent. Professors are recruited from the docent group in the field. Competition is normally such that there is no way to obtain such positions for scholars who are not highly qualified docents or adjunct professors. I see no reason for us to appoint on a lower professional level, hence the proposal for an initial visiting arrangement.

The structural situation in Stockholm changed drastically when the Faculty of Humanities decided to place media studies outside our department circa 1990, and more recently when the co-departmental arrangement with theatre studies came to an end. I was not around at the time when the media and communication programme took shape, but I imagine there must have been some strong convictions concerning the division of labour and discourses between the new department and the cinema studies department. I have not monitored closely what is going on in terms of media studies in Stockholm, but the focus on reception practices within a broad contemporary arena reported by B/F sounds productive, and I look forward to forthcoming dissertations.

Our programme encompasses a variety of topics, approaches and discourses, and,

contrary to what our friends believe, there is an ongoing methodological debate. In terms of current debates around nonfiction cinema, for example, we have had both Noel Carroll and Brian Winston giving papers here, and David Bordwell and Peter Wollen discussing issues related to meaning. As elsewhere, it is primarily the 'grand theory' versus the 'piecemeal' approach that dominates the theoretical arena. We have thirty doctoral students in our programme and their projects are informed by a mixture of discourses – gender studies, questions concerning national cinemas, historical reception, technological issues, theoretical problems and interart approaches – apart from a host of thematic investigations, such as youth movies of the 1950s, invisible characters, the politics of style and political practices in Swedish cinema from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Multimedia and contemporary technologies are also part of the agenda. One of our lecturers, Kjell Jerselius, has just published a self-instructional educational tool for film editing on CD-ROM called *Cut!* The department offers special programmes for advanced undergraduates both in multimedia and gender studies.

It has been important for us to win external research grants from councils and endowments. We have been very successful over the last few years, so successful in fact that almost all of our lecturers have enjoyed temporary leave of absence from their teaching. We have now reached an equilibrium where we can offer temporary assignments to some of our new PhDs thanks to our lecturers' research grants. This state of affairs will soon produce a group of docents.

B/F mention that the Sveriges Television Archives acquired the documentary collection from our leading film producer/distributor Svensk Filmindustri (previously Swedish Biograph) in the 1960s. I am now heading a multidisciplinary research project in collaboration with Sveriges Television Archives called 'Mapping Mentalities', based on that very extensive collection. George

Eastman House in Rochester is also involved. From a broad theoretical framework we want to address questions concerning national mentalities in relation to a culture gradually dominated by moving images; how moving nonfiction images were used, or colonized, by different interests in fostering an understanding of historical processes; how reality was represented and negotiated by audiences. Historiographic considerations, gender issues and ethnographic approaches to meaning play an important methodological part. Newsreels, films produced within corporations, unions and other organizations are the main sources. Parallel to this project, a national inventory of nonfiction film material is under way. The research team consists of scholars from cinema studies, ethnology, cultural geography and history. My own contribution is on the historical reception and visual intersection of the uncanny telephone culture in early cinema from a broad variety of discourses. We are organizing a conference/film festival devoted to film and telephone culture in Stockholm in late 1998 – proposals for papers may be sent to me at the Department of Cinema Studies now.

Conceptual labels are important and there are specific reasons why we have chosen to adopt the term 'cinema studies' instead of 'film studies'. As we see it, cinema is the broader and more global concept, encompassing a wide range of practices and discourses in terms of the institution and of reception, while film studies sounds restrictive and suggests a more exclusively textual approach, irrespective of current British tags. The intersection of cinema and culture is crucial. Apart from textual considerations, which we all have to confront, reception studies (like the reframing culture perspective fruitfully adopted by Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio in their book on Vitagraph) informs most of our research on early cinema. Bo Florin's recent dissertation combines such strategies, and my own texts on censorship and close shots/cut-ins/enlargements

respectively have the same kind of double focus.

So we are not dismissing inspiration from cultural studies; and if all of us are not doing research on contemporary cinema, some are. Tytti Soila is working on a book on women directors focusing on the situation after the 1960s. We are not on our way back to what B/F refer to as 'cinema arts', which probably means a politics of canons grounded in art cinema: more significant in that respect is the canon implicit in screenings of the SFI, the Swedish version of the National Film Theatre, which focuses on national 'quality' films, and dismisses the Swedish legacy of popular cinema. I have recently published a paper on the politics of the national screen in conjunction with the centenary.

Like all departments, we try to give our doctoral students a variety of perspectives and theoretical inspiration. In the Spring semester this year Annette Kuhn gave a course related to her ongoing project on reception practices, which means that our students met someone involved in empirical audience studies. They will also benefit from a course on documentary taught by Bjørn Sørensen from Trondheim.

In spite of B/F's misgivings, we will persist in early cinema projects: this summer John Fullerton, recently appointed from Britain, will offer a course related to his ongoing research project on cinema from the 1910s; and last summer we offered a course on musicals taught by Richard Dyer.

So there is no 'narrowing of research focus', and hopefully that goes for our media friends as well; and, heaven forbid, no 'short-sighted elitism where alternative theories and fertile academic crossovers are suppressed'. I refrain from indulging in the hermeneutics of the latter phrase, but remain convinced that our students are entitled to, and will benefit from, the highest possible level of professional expertise in our department, and from an ongoing exchange with international colleagues. All in all, this, as I see it,

guarantees a plurality of discourses. And if this is still too narrow or parochial a focus, it is reassuring to know that the media departments in Stockholm and throughout the Nordic countries are there to broaden the horizons.

Jan Olsson

Cinema Studies in the Age of Global Media, University of Chicago, 13 April 1996

This one-day symposium was organized to discuss the future of cinema studies as it faces changes brought on by new digital technologies and newly global media.

The symposium, convened by Miriam Hansen, emerged from practical questions about how to organize a cinema studies curriculum for students at the turn of the millennium: what kinds of knowledge, skills and perspectives should we teach in this rapidly changing media environment? There is a perception that the discipline of cinema studies, like many other academic disciplines, is in a state of reconfiguration or even dissolution, and that its traditional objects of inquiry are in question: how do we define the cinema at this historical moment, which methodologies do we use, and to what ends?; what are we to make of the discipline's adoption of a new paradigm or theory every few years, a phenomenon that has been likened to a form of 'serial monogamy'?

The symposium was divided into three panels (Institution/s of Cinema and Cinema Studies: the Stakes of Transformation; Media Publics: Cinema as Expanded Field; Methodology, Theory, and Paradigm Shifts) and a roundtable discussion. The diverse group of participants (including Rick Altman, Awam Amkpa, Richard Dyer, Dilip Gaonkar, Katie Trumpener, Virginia Wexman, and many others) raised crucial questions about the coherence, viability and purpose of cinema

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studies as a discipline. The debates that emerged revolved primarily around three major issues. First, many participants raised the question of an epistemological 'break' – that is, whether the current rise of digital and electronic media such as video, cable television and the Internet represents a fundamental 'break' from past forms, or whether we are simply witnessing the changes prompted by new technologies that have always characterized the cinema's history. Although most panelists assumed that the cinema has changed, participants disagreed about the nature and force of this change. Second, the question of cinematic 'specificity' was debated – a favourite topic of film theory in the 1920s and 1930s made newly pertinent by today's electronic technologies. What does it mean to invoke the idea of film-specific aesthetics today when new technologies are affecting the material quality of moving images and recorded sound, and when the cinemagoing experience itself has been likewise transformed with the rise of multiplex cinemas, cable television and Blockbuster Video stores? Should cinema studies take an intermedia approach, focusing on all the new media? Or does this approach preclude the specificity of the filmic medium, making it more important to focus on film's particular place within these expanded media? Third, participants returned frequently to the issue of globalization. What is new about the current version of global capitalist expansion, and how have film audiences been affected by these changes? How does the new media's global scope require us to broaden cinema studies from a perspective dominated by Hollywood and the European cinema to include a greater diversity of film and media practices, both on a global scale and within particular national and local contexts, than have been thus far examined?

Despite the seemingly ever-increasing 'heterogeneity' of cinema studies, Dudley Andrew and Annette Michelson stressed the continued importance and specificity of the

celluloid image – the traditional object of film studies – particularly the artisanal mode of film production. On the other hand, Anne Friedberg welcomed the challenges that rapidly developing digital technology such as CD-ROMs and the Internet pose to 'the cinema' as it has been previously defined. Friedberg stated that 'just as the chemically based analogue images of photography have been displaced by digital images, abolishing the camera, the cinema has been displaced by systems of circulation and transmission which abolish the projection screen'.

Friedberg's claim that the camera has been abolished became a bone of contention during discussion: participants disagreed about the nature of this alleged abolition. Later on, for example, Philip Rosen said: 'reports of the death of the camera are as exaggerated as reports of the death of the nation'. However, Friedberg's claims about the novelty of digital image presentation – no longer via a projection screen – would seem to echo Rosen's earlier statement that new technologies have a greater effect on distribution than on production. Friedberg also argued that films such as *JFK* and *Forrest Gump* represent Hollywood's use of digital image manipulation which makes it easy for films to change or revise history. (Annette Michelson later suggested that digital imaging makes it entirely possible for Elvis Presley to star posthumously in his next film.) For Friedberg, digital image manipulation forcefully calls into question the traditional 'realism' of photographic images: digital technology threatens film by competing with it on the very level of representation, as well as on the material level of consumer producthood.

Tom Gunning next discussed the 'identity crisis' that cinema (and cinema studies) seems perpetually to suffer from, pointing out that like today's cinema, early cinema also existed as a 'scavenger' on other media such as photography and world's fairs. Early cinema viewers also worried over the mechanical image's power to transform reality and alter

visual history, and so the current digitization of film and the cinema's parasitic relationship with other media are hardly new. Gunning spoke of film theorists of the 1920s and 1930s from Eisenstein to Bazin who, like today's cinema scholars, were also concerned with the specificity of the filmic medium. Gunning urged scholars today to remember and utilize these theoretical roots, demonstrating that a concern with cinematic specificity predates the current academic interest in the subject.

Among those downplaying the notion that digitization has created a radical break in the cinema and cinema studies was Philip Rosen, who expressed his suspicion of the whole rhetoric of breaks that frequently characterizes intellectual discussions in general. 'All my professional life I've been reading about epistemological breaks and radical ruptures', Rosen said, observing that the idea of a break has lost its force. The (academic) institution lends itself to repeated discovery of radical novelty, when in fact technological novelty is not new to the cinema but constitutive of it. As already noted, Rosen argued that the changes at hand are more operative on the level of distribution (video, for example) than production. Thus the digital is only 'the latest ideolect of a cinematic break in an ongoing rhetoric of epistemological breaks that has come to characterize academic discourse'.

This question of the 'break' – whether or not one exists – heavily informed discussions of race and nationality in the 'age of global media'. Ed Guerrero talked about the unequal power relations that still shape the cinematic institution, despite any radically new technologies it might adopt. For example, he pointed out that in the entirely computer-generated film, *Toy Story*, all of the animated characters are white, producing an exclusionary world of 'cyber-whiteness' – the film may be digital, but the same racial codes are still in place, the same hierarchies are still operative. Noting the increasingly globalized nature of media production, Guerrero suggested that the problem of the colour line

that DuBois predicted for the twentieth century will be followed by the 'problem of the "other" line' in the twenty-first – cinema studies must challenge and complicate the typical black/white binary and decentre models of classical spectatorship in the new context of global media.

Hamid Naficy delivered the talk that most specifically addressed the issue of globalization in material detail. Naficy began by emphasizing two key elements of globalization: the consolidation of economic capital and the fragmentation of publics and nationalities. These centripetal and centrifugal movements are well represented in various versions of cable television, from regional MTV to what Naficy calls transnational television (foreign language broadcasts imported into another country, such as Univision or Telemundo in the USA; corporate-run stations which do not address problems of acculturation or politics) and diaspora television (local, smaller companies consumed by a small, relatively cohesive group). One particularly evocative example of diaspora television Naficy mentioned was MED TV, a Kurdish-language station run by Kurdish exiles in several European countries for specifically nationalistic purposes. Naficy quoted one scholar as saying that the station is 'realizing the dream of Kurdish sovereignty, at least in the sky'.

In response, Donald Crafton questioned the relationship between new media technologies and power, particularly the notion that ethnic television narrowcasting or the Internet give their viewers/users increased control over what is produced and consumed. Arguing for the importance of who controls the new technologies, Crafton read some recent letters to the newspaper advice columnist Ann Landers, in which a series of marriages are threatened by technology. The letters were written by 'Internet widows', people whose spouses have been spending too much time on the Internet, or whose partners have been flirting online and rushed off to meet their new

love interest face to face. In all these situations one mate controls the technology while the other does not. Landers's advice was to steer clear of the new technology since it is proving to be such a menace to the family.

The most contentious discussion of the symposium took place during the third panel, 'Methodology, Theory and Paradigm Shifts', in which there was much discussion of the relative merits of three paradigms of cinema studies: psychoanalytic/semiotic theory, cognitive psychology and cultural studies. Mary Ann Doane took on the new book *Post-Theory*, edited by David Bordwell and Noel Carroll. Doane outlined the book's disdain for what it calls 'Grand Theory' – supposedly coercive and dogmatic – and summarized the book's call for a turn to theories with a lower-case 't'. The book enacts a familiar debate between psychoanalysis and cognitivism, with cognitivism coming out the winner; neither semiotics, deconstruction nor structural anthropology is the alleged culprit in film studies, but psychoanalysis. 'The alert psychoanalyst would no doubt smell a symptom here', Doane said, claiming that the book lumps widely disparate and incompatible theories into one large mass – Grand Theory – and then funnels differences into inaccurate Theory/theories binaries. Ultimately Doane made a case for 1980s-style film theory, which was unafraid of productive generalizations and which generated much groundbreaking feminist analysis. Doane argued that *Post-Theory*'s wholesale dismissal of the legacy of 1970s and 1980s film theory is not only incorrect and normalizing, but dangerous.

During his talk, *Post-Theory* coeditor Noel Carroll did indeed enact the duel between cognitivism and psychoanalysis. Carroll claimed to be structuring the opposition as a dialectic between the two paradigms, stating that 'psychoanalysis is only there to address mental aberrations, nothing else'. The function of psychoanalysis is 'to explain the inexplicable', what cannot be explained rationally, cognitively or semantically: in

short, psychoanalysis can only begin to be useful where cognitive approaches leave off. Needless to say these claims sparked off a heated debate during the question-and-answer session. Panel moderator Homi Bhabha could no longer remain a neutral party and jumped in with an attack on Carroll's 'dialectical' method. 'This is some kind of straw man psychoanalysis and some kind of Rambo cognitivism', Bhabha exclaimed, calling for Carroll to nuance his critique and address the 'texture' of psychoanalysis.

Many questions were raised over the course of the day, but few conclusions were reached: indeed, the goal of the symposium was not so much to answer questions as to articulate and assess them. Despite a few significant exceptions, issues of globalization were not treated with enough frequency or depth. The term 'globalization' often came to stand for either Hollywood movies as experienced in developing nations, or for films from non-western countries, when actually the phenomenon involves much more complex cross-pollinations and larger economic and transnational flows. Another shortcoming of the symposium was the lack of attention to pedagogy. Although raised as an important issue at the start of the symposium, few participants addressed what kind of curriculum cinema studies should be formulating and what kinds of teaching methods would be most effective at the turn of the millennium.

The most contested question that emerged from the symposium seemed to be the basic one: how do we define the object of cinema studies? The term 'cinema' may already include digital image manipulation such as the special effects now prevalent in big-budget Hollywood movies (from *Terminator*'s 'morphing' to *Toy Story*'s entirely digital image—world). But should the terminology be expanded to read in one breath 'cinema and media', in order also to include phenomena like virtual reality video games or the desktop screen we encounter as the World Wide Web? Here the consensus seemed to be on the side

of expanding the field to include new media, although some participants did urge us not to forget past legacies of film aesthetics, film criticism and film theory. As Thomas Elsaesser pointed out, invoking Barthes, the new multimedia context in which we

experience 'the cinema' makes it impossible for us ever to leave it, even though we may be outside the walls of the movie theatre. Clearly, we have not yet begun to leave the cinema.

Jennifer Peterson and Jacqueline Stewart

reviews

review:

Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley and Esteban Muñoz (eds), *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*. London: Duke University Press, 1996, 280pp.

Juan A. Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 353pp.

MICHAEL O'PRAY

There has been an explosion of academic interest in Warhol in the past few years after the lull following the major touring exhibition of his paintings and films in the late 1980s, shortly after his death. Warhol's iconic status as gay artist, plus the current entrancement with the phenomenon of the US avant gardes of the 1960s, are two powerful reasons for the revival, and for the appearance of these two books. Not unrelated is Warhol's influence on contemporary young artists, like the British installation artist Sam Taylor-Wood, who have hijacked both the 'performance' aspects of his films and his ironic 'cool'. This is in contrast to an earlier generation's obsession with the same work's 'minimalist' qualities (Peter Gidal's work is paradigmatic of this Warhol-based film structuralism). Despite their shortcomings, both of these books are a welcome and at times provocative contribution to this burgeoning field.

From being a figure treated as a somewhat pathetic cruiser of the New York glitterati in the 1970s and 1980s, Warhol has been 'rescued' by queer theory in a kind of 'outing' strategy, and by the much cooler cultural need to reassess the 1960s as a turning point in the merging of mass culture with the aspirations of high art in the name of cultural 'opposition'. Suarez's book occupies the latter terrain, tangling with the New York 1960s film underground through

its three most influential and mythical figures – Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith and Warhol himself. On the other hand, Doyle et al focus on Warhol, encompassing the full range of his work – films, paintings, writings and, more debatably, his life as ‘queer’ performance. Suarez focuses on the aforementioned unholy trinity who are all gay (and from which only Anger survives), and also wants to supplant these artists from high-art avant-garde formalism and place them in a gay-inflected postmodernist framework. No doubt there is something cooking when three of the most influential and most emblematic figures of the avant garde are gay. It is a subject that has been crying out for attention for some time and Suarez has to be thanked for attempting to make some sense of it – even if, in the end, he perhaps makes *too much* sense of it.

Rightly, he draws in the three filmmakers around their borrowings from and exploration of mass-cultural ephemera and phenomena (comics, camp, gay pornography, subcultures, and so on). In fact, Suarez wants to define the avant garde as a set of practices necessarily ‘understood in relation to dominant modes of artistic and cultural production, which notably includes mass culture’ (p. xi). As Suarez acknowledges, historians like David E. James¹ and Peter Wollen² share his cultural approach, both having signposted in their writings the cultural complexity incumbent on any understanding of the films. Wollen has picked up on the camp postmodernist elements; but then Parker Tyler, as early as 1969,³ had Warhol’s drag artist Mario Montez, ‘superstar’ of *Harlot* (1964), pinned down wittily as a case of ‘camp existentialism’. Nonetheless, Suarez has explored these themes very thoroughly, even if his account of Warhol rests very much on turning something of a blind eye to many of the early, silent, slowed-down films like *Kiss* (1963), *Eat* (1963), *Haircut* (1963), *Henry Geldzahler* (1964), *Empire* (1964), *Couch* (1964) and *Thirteen Most Beautiful Women* (1964). Whilst some of these obviously owe something to cultural elements (high-society hostesses, fashionable museum curators, camp posing), they do not strike one as being *about* such things. Warhol’s choice of fixed shot, slowed-down (from 24fps to 16fps) projection cannot be ignored, and turns the work inwards towards the ‘aesthetic’ avant gardism of the period, and not outwards towards mass culture (although Thomas Waugh in Doyle et al. makes a good case for these films being influenced by gay pornography).

Pointedly, Suarez speaks of Warhol’s films as being ‘eminently devoted to real time’, which is true *qua* filming but not *qua* projection of the many early ones. Suarez mistakenly aligns these with ‘real-time’ filmmaking whereas they were importantly shown at slow speed, shifting the spectator into an aesthetic awareness of surface texture, flicker (the slow speed for projectors was upped to 18fps to stop flicker) and, of course, time itself.

Equally, Ronald Tavel’s importance for Warhol is underestimated by Suarez, as it is by many commentators.⁴ Tavel was brought in by

1 David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

2 Peter Wollen, ‘Raiding the icebox’, in Michael O’Pray (ed.), *Andy Warhol: Film Factory* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp. 14–27.

3 Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: a Critical History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

4 James, *Allegories of Cinema*, does not mention him, for example.

Warhol once he switched to an Auricon sound camera at the end of 1964. In 1965, Tavel worked on and scripted a series of important films: *Harlot* (1964), *Suicide* (1965), *Screen Test 1* (1965), *Screen Test 2* (1965), *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1965), *Drink* (1965), *Horse* (1965), *Vinyl* (1965), *Kitchen* (1965), *Hedy* (1965), *More Milk Yvette* and a sequence of *The Chelsea Girls* in the following year. For any account to convince, these rather unusual films (some rarely seen) have to find their place.

Suarez is also unconvincing in relating Warhol's film to fashion in terms of consumerism and theatricality – the pose. Surely Warhol's fundamental debt to Jack Smith (acknowledged by Warhol) was in his use of 'actors' and camp theatricalization, which owes very little to fashion and more to Hollywood and the Theatre of the Ridiculous⁵ which Suarez describes in his chapter on Smith. It could be argued that a kind of histrionic performance element was always part and parcel of the underground scene, as witnessed, for example, in Maya Deren's and Sidney Peterson's films of the late 1940s.

Cultural reductionism also haunts Suarez's chapter on Anger. In the classic *Scorpio Rising* (1963), which is the key film in his argument that Anger embodies a tension between a fascist and anti-authoritarian thematic, Suarez shoehorns Anger into the mass culture epiphenomenon. Sitney, Tyler, Durgnat and Rayns⁶ have all noted this duality but declined to stop there, and quite appropriately have connected *Scorpio* to Anger's broader oneiric and self-confessed Romanticist vision. The tension is not one between aspects of bike-boys, but what they psychically project.⁷ The trouble with Suarez's view is that it is too literal. Of course pop, subcultures, Hollywood movies and fashion are components of *Scorpio* (and his fragment *Kustom Kar Kommando* [1965], also missing from Suarez's book), but its structure alone points to a more metaphoric reading in which mise-en-scene and surface subject matter is reconstructed or transformed into a film which is not separated off from the rest of Anger's tiny *oeuvre*. Too much of Anger's work oscillates around Romanticist proclivities heavily saturated in ritual (often Satanic) for the mass culture view to stick. Anger's only straightforwardly gay film, *Fireworks*, was made, astonishingly, in 1947, and disturbs Suarez's account of Anger to the extent that the film is straightjacketed into a humanist modernist aesthetic. This is unconvincing and is an example of cultural studies distorting film history for its own purposes.

Suarez's thesis is most successful when it deals with Jack Smith, mainly, one guesses, because Smith never flirted with either avant-garde minimalism or Anger's post-Cocteau Romanticism. Smith missed the 1940s when Anger began working, and was up and going by the 1960s when Warhol took off. Smith's performance-cum-installation work (mainly lost to posterity) was anarchic, relatively politicized in a Beats sort of way, and aesthetic – and it is an *aesthetic*

5 See Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre: the Original Theatre of the City of New York from the mid-60s to the mid-70s* (London: Methuen, 1986).

6 Oddly, Suarez does not refer at all to the small book edited by Jayne Pilling and myself, *Into the Pleasure Dome: the Films of Kenneth Anger* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), which contains essays, including ones covering *Scorpio Rising*, by Ray Durgnat and Tony Rayns. It also has Anger's own fascinating essay 'Modesty and the art of film' dating from 1951.

7 See Anger's own remarks to this effect in Pilling and O'Play, *Into the Pleasure Dome*, pp. 24–5.

in an oddly old-fashioned way, with his obsession with surface textures and the sheer physical presence of debris, knickknacks, cult objects, and so forth. Suarez, rightly, focuses as much on the performances – seen by very few – as on Smith’s classic film *Flaming Creatures*. Maybe the sheer momentariness of these intense tableaux suit the argument better. Like much of mass culture they are of the moment – passing, ephemeral, awkward in the world of art values.

Doyle et al plough some of the same territory as Suarez, although it is a fairly patchwork affair underpinned by queer theory’s view of the subject/self as role-player which one thought had been trounced theoretically some time ago. The essays are of mixed quality and extremely wide ranging, including Mandy Merck’s excellent piece on Warhol’s shoe paintings and gay sexuality, along with pieces by Eve Sedgwick, Thomas Waugh, David James and Simon Watney. There is much contention in the editors’ introduction: for example, the view that ‘Warhol’s legacy is not one of “influence” in the sense of a progenitor or father figure’ seems false, especially when one surveys the work and remarks of such contemporary British artists as Douglas Gordon, Sam Taylor-Wood and Sarah Lucas. For many practitioners outside the Academy, Warhol is quintessentially an ‘author’ despite David James’s writings.

Waugh’s is a genuine contribution to Warhol scholarship, both in his well-researched contention that Warhol’s aesthetic borrowed from the gay porn of the period and in his analysis of the gay audience for Warhol’s films in the 1960s. On historically placing Warhol as gay, Simon Watney makes points (rather obvious but necessary ones) that undermine some of the editors’ rather wild claims. For example, he rightly states that the indifference of gay commentators to Warhol was due likely to the latter’s sexual and, crucially, artistic formation prior to the militant gay liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

Warhol, like Anger, Smith, Johns and Jarman, was of a generation which placed art above politics – sexual or otherwise. This is not to say that sexuality (or politics for that matter) did not find its way into their work – it obviously did and often quite intentionally – but gay-identity cultural practices (arriving very late in the careers of these artists) were anathema to them for a variety of reasons, probably having as much to do with their reluctance to ‘join’ any kind of sociopolitical grouping as with the sociopolitical articulation of gay sexuality at the time. Some of the writers in the volume seem to reveal an ahistorical view of gay life in their griping at Warhol’s refusal to ‘intelligently respond’ to AIDS. Flatley, in a rather far-fetched essay, believes this was to do with Warhol’s ‘phobic and shame-filled relation to illness’; but as Watney points out, Warhol never responded to *anything*, in that sense. As far as I know, neither did Smith, Anger nor other gay filmmakers like Harry Smith, and illness phobia is hardly a common factor here.

Muñoz’s essay on Warhol, Basquiat and race begins with the

disconcerting and surely insulting view that the ‘obstacles and pressures’ of American culture on gays and blacks ‘are as brutally physical as a police bully club or the fists of a homophobic thug’. Implying an equation between the contemporary African-American experience and that of blacks in a pre-Mandela-governed South Africa is a piece of nonsense. Muñoz proceeds to make a series of essentialist-type statements about race – why shouldn’t Basquiat like Superman or Warhol? The problem lies in Muñoz’s misuse of the notion of identification. Did Basquiat ‘identify’ with Superman or Warhol and, if he did, in what sense is the term being used here? In the same vein, Flatley also suggests that when we consume a product ‘we can identify ourselves with everyone else who consumes that product’. But do we? And, if so, in what way is that not trivial? This seems to be a collapse of a quantitative matter into a psychological one.

Michael Moon discusses the ‘queer-child pastoral’. While fascinating, his argument is built on the questionable premiss of what he claims to be a screen memory involving cut-out dolls, Dick Tracy and Hershey bars culled from Warhol’s *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. Why this is a screen memory and not simply a memory is unclear. Eve Sedgwick’s provocative *belles lettres* piece is couched in her performativity theory. The idea of the self as simply a set of roles to be played out and played with belongs either with certain varieties of behaviourism or with the more rarefied views of existentialism, although lacking the latter’s rigorous ontological and epistemological bulwarks. There seems to be a profound confusion between, on one hand, the fact that at times we may act a role, and that in some cultures and in bits of cultures, so to speak, such acting is a mode of survival (like Warhol perhaps, and Sartre’s waiter) and, on the other, the quite separate claim that all subjects comprise roles. This conflation seems to be the result of trying to theorize from the narrow basis of certain cultural experiences and forms – drag, covert sexuality, shyness, and so on in the gay arena, or at least one view of it. There also lurks the equally suspect notion of the ‘masquerade’ as some sort of general theoretical position about women, purloined from Kleinian psychoanalysis. Sedgwick’s remarks on shyness and queerness *à propos* Warhol are interesting, but on blackness are vulnerable to being characterized as pop psychology.

While both books are revealing of the merits and disadvantages of a cultural studies approach to film, they do stir up debate in an area which has been sadly neglected for some time.

review:

Duncan Petrie, *The British Cinematographer*. London: British Film Institute, 1996, 182pp.

VINCENT PORTER

A hundred years have passed since Auguste and Louis Lumiere showed their first cinematograph films at the Polytechnic in London's Regent Street. Yet there was hardly any mention in the film industry's self-congratulatory centenary celebrations of the role that cinematographers have played in the history of the film medium. Indeed, the art and craft of the cinematographer has been ignored and virtually forgotten by most film historians. Duncan Petrie's *The British Cinematographer* is therefore a welcome attempt to open a neglected area of film history and to offer it up for reassessment and discussion.

The book falls into two parts. The first is an outline history of the ways in which cinematographers working within the British film industry made use of and responded to the new technological developments in the fields of lighting, cameras, film stocks and sound recording. Petrie examines a number of key historical moments in some depth, including the coming of sound, the impact and use of colour stocks and the subsequent widescreen revolution. He makes extensive use of both published texts and oral sources, such as the BECTU oral history archive and his own personal interviews. The second part of the book features filmographies and in-depth career profiles of over fifty major cinematographers.

Petrie's attempts to re-evaluate the role of the cinematographer in British cinema are welcome because they raise a neglected aspect of the role of individual authorship in what is essentially a collective production process. It may be true, as the publicity for the book

emphasizes, that British cinematographers have been widely recognized by their peers as among the most artistically and technically accomplished in the world, but in order to make a contribution to the critical re-evaluation of British films, it is necessary to go beyond a potted technical and economic history of the British film industry linked to a series of filmographies of the major British cinematographers. There are two key issues which have yet to be addressed: the first is the role allocated, and I use the word advisedly, to the cinematographer in the division of productive labour in British film production; the second, and more difficult, is the extent to which the creative contribution of the cinematographer to a film can be perceived and evaluated by the ordinary spectator of today.

Although the cinematographer initially played the pivotal role in the filmmaking process by transforming the light reflected from the profilmic event into a silver-based image, there were others who wanted to reduce him – and in those days the cinematographer was always a man – to a mere technician. Over the years, led of course by Hollywood, they slowly succeeded. At Biograph, D.W. Griffith gradually eased Billy Bitzer out of creative control. When they filmed on location, it was customary to set up the camera in a position which offered some shade to both the camera and the cinematographer; and this often determined the background of the shot concerned. To get the camera out of the shade, Griffith often had to resort to subterfuge. In Bitzer's case, a couple of bottles of beer were sufficient to do the trick.

But the major Hollywood studios introduced a more thoroughgoing reorganization of the production process. The first principle of scientific management, as dictated by its founder Fredrick Winslow Taylor, was to gather together all the traditional knowledge which has been possessed by the workmen and to reduce this to rules, laws and formulae. Management could then remove all brain power from the shop floor and centre it in the planning department. In Hollywood, and in much British production, the cinematographer was also subjected to these new managerial arrangements. The processing of film stock was standardized by the film laboratories, quality control of the rushes was exercised by the film's producer or the studio head; and even the position of the camera, and how it was to move, came to be dictated by the film's director.

On many films, virtually the only freedom that was left to the cinematographer was to decide where to place his lights. In Hollywood many of the studios even sought to dictate that, requiring the cinematographer 'to put his light where the money was' and by specifying 'the look' of their films: MGM wanted an opulent glossy look, while Warner Bros favoured low-key lighting. As producer-director Otto Preminger told the young interviewers from *Movie* in 1962, 'Actually camerawork is now a science, not an art. It's no more a question of a *touch* in lighting, its mathematics. If you describe what

you want and the man knows his job he can do it; there's no art about it any more.'¹

Naturally, the balance between art and technique varied from film to film. It could also be very different outside Hollywood. In Weimar Germany, the shortage of film stock led to a different division of labour from that developed by Hollywood: *Regiesitzungen*, in which the cinematographer, like everybody else, could ask for changes in even the art director's proposals for the sets if he thought he could see a way of achieving a better result. In the British film industry, which at various times and in different studios was heavily influenced by both US and German production practices, conditions varied widely. At Gainsborough they closely followed the Hollywood model, but at Gaumont-British, the art department was dominated by Alfred Junge, who turned the German tradition of *Regiesitzungen* to his own personal advantage by being the first to establish in Britain the designer's right to fix the camera viewpoint for all setups. Although Petrie mentions this fact, he fails to pursue the significance of his own observation, that 'the art of cinematography in Britain is as much bound up with the skill and creative ambition of directors such as Dupont, Hitchcock and Asquith and designers, such as Junge' (p. 19).

The creative role played by the cinematographer in making a film could therefore vary widely according to the conditions of production. As time went by, and both scientific knowledge and technical developments became more widespread, it became progressively easier for the technically able cinematographers to develop a more diffused naturalistic style of lighting. This was quicker to set up, and therefore cheaper. It was traditionally associated with the social realist tradition of British cinema. In the 1950s some established cinematographers, like Gilbert Taylor and Ossie Morris, developed this approach with directors J. Lee-Thompson and Tony Richardson. But in the 1960s a new generation of cinematographers also came to the fore, many of whom had learnt their craft in documentary or sponsored films. Among them were Walter Lassally – Tony Richardson's preferred cameraman – and Billy Williams and David Watkin, who had both worked for British Transport Films in the 1950s. Some older cinematographers, such as Geoffrey Unsworth or Douglas Slocombe, also adapted their lighting to the new softer style that was now in vogue. Many of them followed the US money back to Hollywood in the early 1970s. Others stayed behind to give 'lighting workshops' at the National Film School (later the National Film and Television School) and the London International Film School. Now cinematography was no longer an exclusively male preserve: the new generation included many women as well as men.

The new vogue for a diffused naturalistic style of lighting brought with it a significant change in the hierarchy of the camera department. Traditionally, the camera operator was number two to the cinematographer, but when a director such as Joseph Losey or Neil

Jordan wished to employ a more fluid style of cinematography, the relationship between the film director and the camera operator could become particularly important, as both directors subsequently acknowledged. According to Petrie, the changed relationship between director and camera operator did not extend to Hollywood.

Although much of the evidence about the changing nature of the division of labour in film production is implicit in *The British Cinematographer*, the author does little to foreground its significance. Instead, there is a latent romantic emphasis on the potentially authorial, but critically neglected, grade of the cinematographer. Although he highlights the fact that British cameramen won twenty-two Academy Awards between 1940 and 1990, Petrie does not examine which section of the Academy made these awards, or why Hollywood put cameramen in the technical personnel section, along with special effects technicians, when it established the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1927, the year after it signed the basic studio agreement with the five major studio unions.

Thus *The British Cinematographer* maps only the first step towards a more challenging stage in the critical re-evaluation of British cinema. Although the author has put the role of the cinematographer on the intellectual agenda for the authorial study of British film, along with the producer, the director, the scriptwriter, the art director and even the costume designer, there is a danger that his approach could lead to even more film technicism, or, worse, to mere film buffery. Spot the cinematographer could become the film buff's small-talk for 1997.

Another problem for the critical re-evaluation of British cinema is that spectators are often expected to watch poor quality prints. Most 16mm prints hired to university departments and colleges are technically poor and videocassettes and television broadcasts, although sometimes technically better, always suffer from being seen on the small screen and projected by an electronic, rather than an optical, system. As successive generations of prints are produced from second, third or even fourth generation internegatives, the tonal range is reduced, colours are distorted, the images lose their detail and audiences come to accept poor standard images as the norm. To some extent black-and-white cinematographers can allow for this problem in their lighting. I once raised this issue with the great Charles Rosher when he came to London in about 1970. 'For which did you light your pictures', I asked him, 'the first preview print, or the second or third generation release prints which most of the public would see?'. His answer was unequivocal, 'Oh, it was always the first preview print. That is the one that would be seen by the producer who could give me my next job!' His films were lit for his next employer, not for the great American public, still less for that in Great Britain.

The issue is important for the critical re-evaluation of the work of British cinematography. It is essential for the new generation of critics

and students of film not merely to investigate the authorial issues thrown up by the historical changes in the conditions of production in which individual films were produced, but also for them to understand the technical limitations imposed on the conditions of reception by the industrial processes of film distribution and exhibition. It is not just a question of cleaning an old master, as is frequently the case with a painting.

In a limited number of cases, relief from these industrial and technical limitations may be obtained where an original negative is held by the BFI's National Film and Television Archive, and where funds are available to strike a new print. But in general, the struggle to re-evaluate the roles in British film history played by British cinematographers requires the spectator to combine a historical awareness of the conditions of production which obtained when the film was made with access to the screening of a top quality print.

Although *The British Cinematographer* represents a welcome step in the critical re-evaluation of British cinema, there is still a long way to go. In much mainstream film production, the industrial exigencies of production, distribution and exhibition continue to bear down particularly heavily on the aspirant art of the cinematographer.

review:

Manuela Gieri, *Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies of Subversion, Pirandello, Fellini, Scola and the Directors of the New Generation*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1995, 301pp.

CRISTINA DEGLI-ESPOSTI

Manuela Gieri's book on Italian cinema is a fundamental contribution to the field of film studies. Using a highly innovative and original approach, the volume presents a completely new reading of the historiography of Italian cinema. After establishing in the early chapters the importance of Luigi Pirandello's theoretical ideas in relation to the cinema, the author explores some unexpected possibilities of interpretation. Mapping the condition of Italian cinema over the decades, Gieri's study traces a most interesting itinerary in which she introduces the term *hypergenre* to argue the merging of genres in Italian Cinema (pp. 85–8). Within the spectrum of Italian cinema Gieri sees the recurrence of a 'countertradition' (pp. 87–8) that expresses itself both in the blurring of boundaries between the various genres and in the undermining of the author as the only reliable source of the filmic discourse. She argues that this mode stems from the ontological questions embedded in Pirandello's works, and from the countertradition they propose. By exploring the subversion of traditional genres in Pirandello's works, Gieri proposes a rather striking possibility: that this Pirandellian mode has not exhausted itself but has been present and active throughout a great part of the twentieth century in the cinema of such directors as Federico Fellini and Ettore Scola, and still continues today in those films which we have come to identify with the New Italian Cinema.

While critics have often recorded the progression of Italian cinema

within 'a tradition', Gieri's work proves otherwise. Hers is a fascinating theory that sheds light on several controversial questions overlooked in many other investigations. Her study reconsiders the excessive claims made for the *cinema d'autore* and questions the pattern of genres which followed from it. She proves that considering Fellini, Antonioni, Bertolucci and Scola as authors separate from other filmmakers is not only incorrect, but offers a rather uncomplicated explanation which avoids the more complex task of investigation that would prove, as her book does, that there are connecting sets of styles linking many directors and running through their films. According to Gieri, Pirandello's critical and theoretical writings and the ontological questions of his novels and plays inhabit many of the films that constitute a countertradition within Italian cinema.

Rejecting the limiting label of 'auteur' for Fellini and other directors commonly labelled as such, Gieri sees beyond the unsatisfactory 'evanescent' classification of auteurism (p. 84) to consider the social, political, historical and economic representations that would link these artists. She explains that the constant crossfertilization of other genres in Italian cinema led to a progression of cinematic forms that would not consolidate in codifiable genres. Italian cinematic comedy which developed in the 1960s had been – since previous decades – a convergence of borrowed forms of spectacle like the theatre, variety shows, musicals and the circus with its *commedia dell'arte* characteristics. These characteristics converged in a national cinema of disguised carnivalistic qualities (p. 167).

The gradual mutual contamination of the genres is most fully developed within melodrama – what Gieri calls 'hypergenre'. Interpreting melodrama as a vehicle to demonstrate the possibility of expressing the image/word relationship, and considering the genre of carnivalization within it, Gieri sees the development of a countertradition that started with Pirandello and his theory of humour: what he called *umorismo*, a mode of interpretation/representation that bears striking similarities to what Mikhail Bakhtin termed 'carnivalesque'.¹ The humorist mode characterized by the presence of both comedy and tragedy becomes the hypergenre that contains the possible encounter and contamination of comedy, tragedy, allegory and symbolism. This becomes visible in the 'melodramatic imagination' of post-neorealist works like Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia/Voyage to Italy* (1953) or De Sica's *Miracolo a Milano/Miracle in Milan* (1950) (p. 158). But Gieri sees Fellini as the one who played the principal role in the development of a cinematic discourse that was grounded in realism but also explored other avenues for the investigation of the real.

Her analysis of Fellini's cinematography and his debt – whether conscious or unconscious – to a Pirandellian mode is both original and accurate. It is, indeed, carried out with observations that are

1 Pirandello, *On Humor*, (1908), trans. and ed., Antonio Illiano and Daniel P. Testa (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1974). Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985).

appropriate and stimulating. She focuses on a 'legacy' passing from Pirandello through Fellini to reach the younger generation of film directors. The Pirandello–Fellini connection – which some might not consider immediately apparent – is thoroughly documented by Gieri in a series of insightful examples that take into consideration the interplay of reality and fantasy in the works of both artists. Pirandello clearly appears in her definition of Fellini's typical protagonist as *umorista*, as humorist (pp. 71–2).

The author divides the book into six chapters, preceded by an introduction in which Pirandello's encounter with the Seventh Art is discussed. This well-documented introduction establishes the importance of Pirandello's connection with the cinema. The first chapter reads as a convincing plea for a reconsideration of Pirandello, whose works and controversial relationship with the cinema are relatively unknown outside Italy. The importance of such a carefully structured basis provides the foundation for a discourse that moves from the early years of the cinema through to the present day. The introduction offers a detailed overview of the cultural period, as well as of the impact of Pirandello not only on Italian, but also on other European, cinema.

Chapter one centres on Pirandello's love–hate relationship with the cinema over a period of thirty years. The main focus of interest in this section is the formulation of a new theory for an innovative rereading of Italian cinema. The chapter is packed with information; a reader unacquainted with Pirandello's relationship with the cinema will find here a thorough analysis.

In chapter two Gieri investigates Pirandello's encounter with cinema theory, tracing Pirandello's developing interest in the cinema in its divergence from the world of the theatre. This section of the book consolidates the Pirandello–cinema relationship and places it in historical perspective.

Chapter three develops a discourse on the affinities between Pirandello and Fellini and his conception of the art of filmmaking. Gieri draws insightful parallels between the two artists and their conceptions of representation. Not merely hinted at, the Pirandello–Fellini affinity is fully explored with clearly explained examples.

With chapter four Gieri develops the discourse of chapter three even further to define the presence of a countertradition within Italian cinema. This section is of particular interest as an attempt to capture the fundamental connections between Pirandello and Fellini. It centres mainly on the countertradition, a certain kind of Italian filmmaking characterized by internal doubling and mirrorings where the character as *umorista* is forced to be aware of her/his own condition (p. 179).

In the next chapter Gieri includes in this countertradition area Ettore Scola, another important director who, along with Fellini, is recognized as a father figure by the younger generation of filmmakers. Her discussion of Scola in light of Pirandellian forms of subversion,

where the theoretical account is backed by a sophisticated analysis of Scola's films, is quite brilliant. The reading of *La terrazza/The Terrace* (1980) is unprecedented in that the author gives clear explanations and references that unmistakeably link Scola to Pirandello and to Fellini via the employment of the protagonist as *umorista*, the choice of setting, actors, and internal citations where the treatment of the character is seen in close dialectical relationship with Pirandello's and Fellini's characters. The viewer-reader who is familiar with Italian cinema will enjoy the countless filmic cross-references that become, especially in this chapter, indispensable in situating Scola within the countertradition, the subversive mode of Italian cinema.

In chapter six the argument raises many interesting questions for a rereading and understanding of the new Italian cinema, especially the cinema of the new generation of filmmakers, linked to Pirandello through Fellini and Scola. This chapter contains an indispensable map of the many paths the new Italian directors seem to have taken, and it presents an intelligent overview of the most recent developments in the Italian film industry. It also brings consistency to Gieri's study and gives convincing proof of the existence of a Pirandellian influence which over the decades has never ceased to be present in Italian cinema. In one of the best overviews of the latest Italian cinema, Gieri perceptively addresses the old question of the neorealist legacy and the subsequent tradition of the comedy 'Italian style'.

The overall organization of Gieri's book is clear and conveys a persuasive demonstration of the impact of Pirandello's works and theoretical ideas on Italian cinema. It goes a long way towards the integration of Italian film studies and Italian cultural studies that has long been the goal of every scholar of Italian cinema, both in Italy and abroad. It constitutes an incentive for new studies and interpretations of Italian cinema, and should have a lasting effect on the reconsideration of Italian cinema and its place in the larger frame of moving images.